

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro

PREVIEW
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.
The FPS genre goes nuclear in the battle for supremacy

FULL REVIEWS
FREESTYLE METALX [PS2/XB/GC]
FREEDOM FIGHTERS [XB/GC/PS2/PC]
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04 [XB/PS2]
SOUL CALIBUR II [PS2/XB/GC]
F-ZERO GX [GC]
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004 [XB/PS2/GC/GBA/PC]
MARIO GOLF [GC]

A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE, JEDI ACADEMY AND KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

The next generation of Star Wars games for the Xbox, PC and GameCube

180 PAGES OF INTERGALACTIC GAMING

PREVIEW
MANHUNT
The most shocking videogame ever?


eMag

As children, most of us will have watched the *Star Wars* trilogy more times than is probably healthy. And for those of us who have graduated to adulthood, the legendary sci-fi series still holds a vice-like grip over millions.

Back when the first trilogy was making waves in the cinema, videogames were still fairly basic affairs, but a trip to the arcade rewarded the *Star Wars* fan with a brilliant arcade game that gave players the chance to re-enact the attack on the Death Star. Atari's shooter might have lacked graphical loveliness but it dripped with authenticity – so much so that it's still a favourite today.

It's clear that most fans simply wish to relive the movies, take part in the key moments from the films or mooch around in an extended *Star Wars* universe. Luckily, those who know their T-65s from their T-16s have been offered many opportunities to do this thanks to LucasArts, and though not all of the games have been impressive, they have managed to convey the magic of George Lucas' vision with aplomb.

As this issue shows, *Star Wars* junkies are going to be able to get their fix for many years to come.

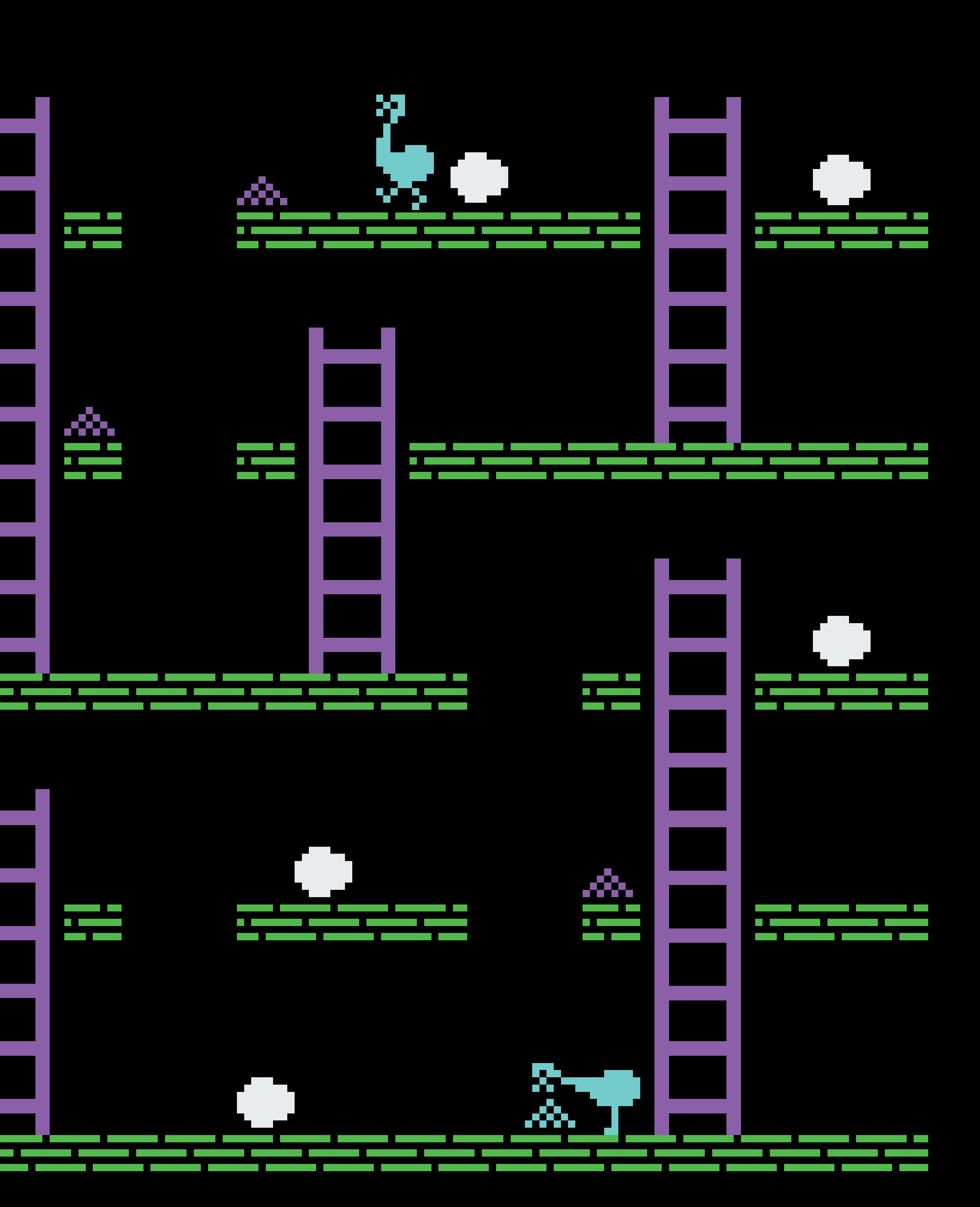
Simon Phillips, Group Editor



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PLAYER 1 LEVEL 02 BO

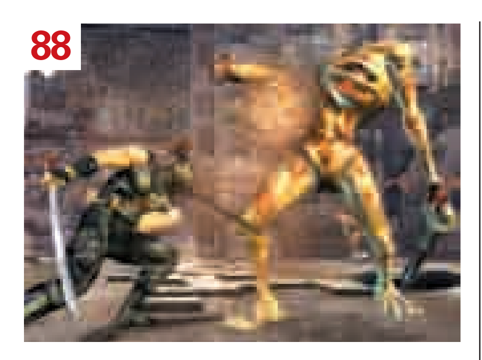
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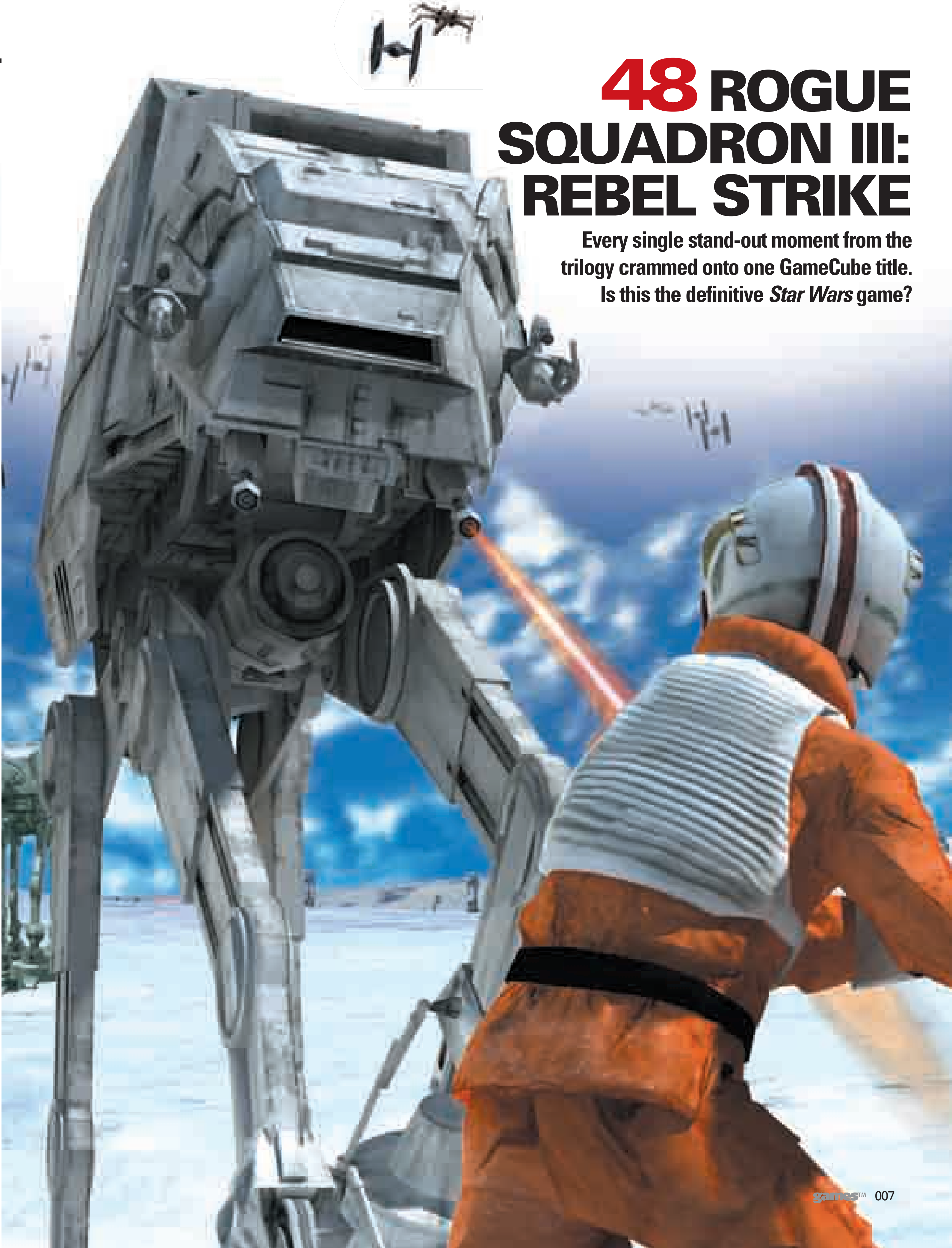
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NINTENDO CLEANS UP

LINK AND CO RULE THE FIRST ANNUAL GAMES™ AWARDS SHOW



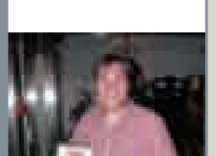
For one night only, Bournemouth's K Bar became the setting for our first annual awards, as voted for by games™ readers. The 11 categories included Best Visuals, Best Developer and the coveted Game of the Year, with nominees ranging from the likes of Konami to *Panzer Dragoon Orta*.

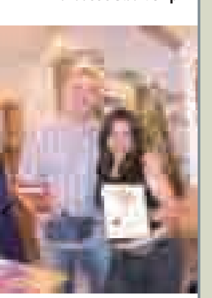
The biggest surprise of the evening was Nintendo taking home what seemed like half of the awards. "That was one hell of a night," said Andrew Muir of Nintendo's PR company, Cake. "My thanks to **games™** for being such great hosts and showering us with all those Nintendo awards, of which we are exceptionally proud. My condolences to anyone who saw me on the dance floor."

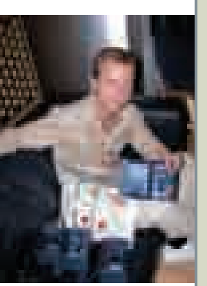
Although Nintendo picked up the majority of the awards including Game Of The Year (*Wind Waker*), Best Visuals (*Wind Waker* again), Best Developer and Best Comeback (*Metroid Prime*), the likes of Wanadoo, Eidos, Capcom and Acclaim all managed to garner large selections of your votes. "I thought it was an awesome evening," enthused Capcom's PR, Sam Brace. "Plus it was extra nice because we won something and that always makes for a fantastic night."

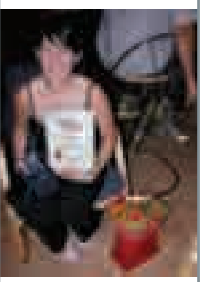
Along with the 11 awards voted for by the readers, a special award was given out to the publisher that we thought had developed the most over the past year in terms of its relationship with the magazine. Take 2 Interactive won this category, with its award collected by Cat Channon. "I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and was thrilled to have received the **games™** special award," she said.

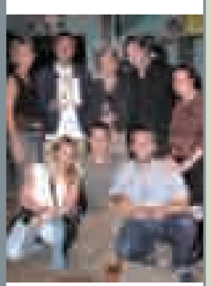
The first **games™** awards night was a fantastic event, which was only outshone by the quality nominations across the board. The magazine's managing editor, Nick Roberts, was also delighted by the success of the evening. "I've been really pleased with the positive response we've had to the first **games™** awards, both from readers and the industry. The night went really well, and all those who took away an award seemed very pleased. I'm looking forward to seeing our awards in software company reception areas around the country."


Wanadoo's Stuart Chiplin


The Eidos PR team


Cake Media's Andrew Muir


Take 2's Cat Channon


The EA marketing team

THE WINNERS IN FULL

While we'd like to have given every nominee an award, there can be only one winner in each category. And here they are.

GAME OF THE YEAR
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER
Link's new look might have initially upset people, but that hasn't stopped you from voting it game of the year.

MOST UNDERRATED TITLE
PROJECT ZERO
It seems like hardly an issue goes by when we're not praising this underrated gem, We're delighted everyone feels the same way.

BEST MULTIPLAYER
TIMESPLITTERS 2
A tough category, but Eidos' superb *TimeSplitters 2* managed to secure the most votes.

BEST USE OF A LICENCE
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4
Rather than cashing in on Mr Hawk's reputation, *THPS4* is a great game in its own right.

BEST VISUALS
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER
Link wins again; yet more proof that Miyamoto-san knows exactly what we want.

BEST USE OF SOUND
BURNOUT 2
Although up against some stiff competition, Acclaim's *Burnout 2* roared its way to success.

BEST COMEBACK
METROID PRIME
Despite an eight-year absence, Samus Aran ensured that her return in *Metroid Prime* would be one to remember.

BEST PERIPHERAL
STEEL BATTALION CONTROLLER
Wildly expensive, but very special to boot. But how many of you simply voted for it just because it looks cool?

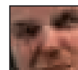
BEST HARDWARE INNOVATION
XBOX LIVE
Another tough category, but the chance of playing the likes of *Unreal Championship* and *Phantasy Star Online* was more than enough to sway the votes.

BEST DEVELOPER
NINTENDO
The GameCube may not have set the world on fire, but when it comes to making fantastic games, Nintendo takes some beating.

BEST PUBLISHER
ELECTRONIC ARTS
In amongst the countless *FIFA* and *James Bond* licences, Electronic Arts has been knocking out a fair amount of quality software. Let's hope this focus on excellent games continues.

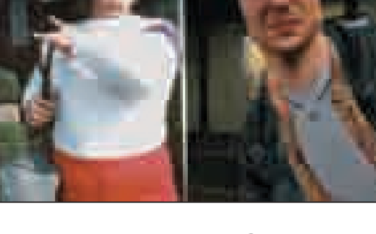
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MAX WHO?

Darryl Peterson has become the latest z-list celebrity to accuse the videogames industry of stealing his identity. Peterson, best known as WCW wrestler Maxx Payne (tag-team partner of Cactus Jack), has allegedly built his life around his wrestling persona. "I left wrestling to come home to Utah and be with my family," explains the disgruntled Peterson. "I now find myself in the biggest battle of my life – to save my identity. They stole something from me that I'm not going to give up." *Max Payne* publisher Rockstar has refused to comment.



THE REAL SNAKE HITS CONSOLES

Cult film character Snake Plissken is to appear in a new Namco title. Actor Kurt Russell and director John Carpenter will be working closely with Namco to ensure that Snake's first game will be every bit as good as his first film, *Escape From New York*. It's not been revealed what genre the new title will fall into, but it has been confirmed it will involve Plissken battling through a post-apocalyptic universe.





WE'RE BIGGER THAN YOU

INDEPENDENT RETAILERS CONTINUE TO SUFFER AS NINTENDO TIGHTENS ITS GRIP ON IMPORTERS

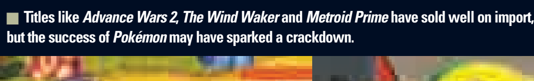
Popular independent retailer Another World has become the latest company to suffer under Nintendo's strict anti-import campaign. Visiting Another World's website now shows only static images where its American and Japanese Nintendo titles once used to be.

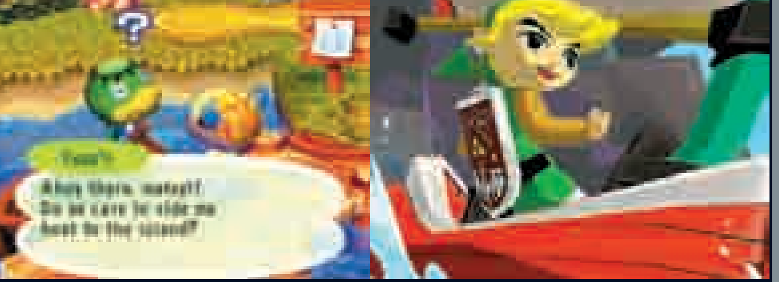
Unfortunately, because of legal reasons, Another World was unable to discuss the ban.

While many firms are in a similar situation, Shaun Johnson of Gamesimporter.com is one importer who's not afraid to speak his mind. "I look at Nintendo as a bullying and arrogant company, what they are doing is criminal and illegal in my eyes," he says. "Dictating is not the way forward and neither is persecuting the very companies and people that have made Nintendo what it is today. The only thing that's hurting Nintendo's sales are its own faults, with delays and lack of equal support across regions being its main problems. If they do not want to address these problems, then that's their prerogative, not mine, and until they do, I will keep using my right as a consumer and my own freedom of choice to get the items I want at reasonable times and prices."

Although Nintendo has been looking into its import problem for some time, it's only recent releases like *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* and *Advance Wars 2* (both Game Boy Advance games) that have managed to come under this close scrutiny. One importer (who, for legal reasons, cannot be named) is insistent that it's only *Pokémon*'s popularity that has caused the

"I LOOK AT NINTENDO AS A BULLYING AND ARROGANT COMPANY. WHAT THEY ARE DOING IS CRIMINAL AND ILLEGAL IN MY EYES"
SHAUN JOHNSON


Titles like *Advance Wars 2*, *The Wind Waker* and *Metroid Prime* have sold well on import, but the success of *Pokémon* may have sparked a crackdown.



recent interest. "Nintendo didn't bat an eyelid when we were selling the likes of *Metroid Prime* or *Wind Waker*," explains the businessman. "Then all of a sudden, when *Pokémon* sells phenomenally in Japan, it brings this ban in."

One reason why people import is because of the long delays between a PAL and NTSC release. We've been enjoying the Japanese versions of *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* since last November, and the US game since March. European gamers have only been able to sample the delights of the latest *Pokémon* titles since 25 July – a full eight months after it was first released. Granted, Nintendo has to convert the European version into many languages, but should loyal gamers have to wait so long to play a game? We don't think so.

If Nintendo is so insistent on stopping importing, we think it would make more sense for it to go after the bigger American and Japanese importers – after all, this is where the majority of stock is being sold. Another way would be to make the Game Boy Advance unable to play import games (like so many home consoles do). However, many independent importers feel that the main reason Nintendo is staying away from the big guns is because it knows that if a court case ever arose it would face much stiffer resistance. Considering the likes of Datel actually make a device – the FreeLoader – to encourage gamers to import (along with Internet importers who provide Japanese switched machines) and are not facing similar problems, this may well be the case. Unfortunately, however, Nintendo's spokesperson has been unavailable for comment, so we can only speculate as to what its actual reasons are.

Another important aspect of import games is the early buzz that new import titles can create. Go to the likes of www.ntsc-uk.com and you'll see how they spread the word about new import releases. We're all major import gamers ourselves and we'll continue to let you know which games are worth importing. It will be a sad day indeed if Nintendo does eventually manage to stop import gaming once and for all.

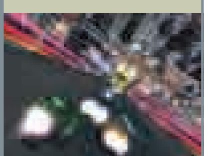


PLEASE RELEASE ME...

Here's a selection of the great games that European gamers are currently missing out on

Advance Wars 2
We demanded that you imported this game as soon as possible when we first reviewed Intelligent Systems' great sequel in issue 8. Regardless of Nintendo's current stance, that demand still stands today.

Animal Crossing
Nintendo's popular collect-'em-up was a huge success, with many importers selling large amounts of the quirky title. Seeing that the game has never been released in the UK, the argument that Nintendo usually uses about import games harming UK sales is somewhat redundant.



F-Zero GX
Quite simply one of the fastest and best futuristic racers around, SEGA's Amusement Vision has created a perfect arcade conversion. There are extra tracks, a story mode and many more features for budding racers to try out – you even get an Arcade card to link with *F-Zero AX*.



Viewtiful Joe
Capcom's glorious beat-'em-up has been wowing hard-core gamers with its frantic pace, in-depth combo system and stunning visuals. All in all, yet another essential import purchase.



SONIC SHUFFLE

SEGA FINALLY ANNOUNCES ITS SEVEN NEW STUDIOS

Following on from re-entering the European market as publishers, SEGA has now revealed its new studios and the markets on which each will focus. Sonic Team consists of Sonic Team and United Game Artists and will create games for 'casual' users. SEGA AM2 remains untouched and will develop games targeted at SEGA's core fan base, and the tentatively named Wow Works is made up of Overworks and WOW Entertainment and will be working on games for next-generation machines that are suitable for all audiences.

Smilebit and Amusement Vision retain their titles but have had a reshuffle between the two teams. As a result Smilebit will now focus on the development of future sports titles, while Amusement Vision will concentrate on titles involving movies. The final two studios will be Hitmaker (consisting of Hitmaker and SEGA Rosso) and Cinematic Online Games (Yu Suzuki's new studio, which will concentrate on blockbuster titles).

"SEGA's studio reorganisation is designed to streamline the development process of our games divisions, but also to allow us to expand our portfolio of games," said Asam Ahmad, head of PR at SEGA Europe. "The merging of certain studios will allow greater focus in certain areas and the creation of Yu Suzuki's new studio will allow SEGA to look at new ideas and concepts to broaden SEGA's entertainment profile."

With many console-specific teams now being grouped together, we're fully expecting to see many more games appearing across multiple platforms. Just imagine playing *Super Monkey Ball 3* online via your PS2 or Xbox, or finally being able to play *Initial D* or the fantastic *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* on something other than a PS2. There are some exciting times ahead…

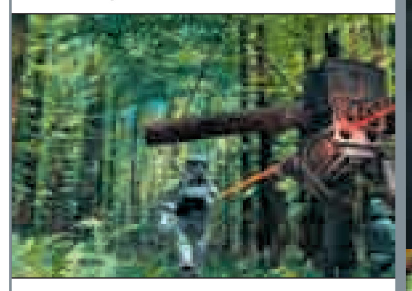
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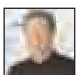
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BARGAIN AHOY

Keen to get the dollars rolling in well before *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike* gets anywhere near the shelves, LucasArts is tempting US Cube owners to part with their readies early by offering a special bonus disc with all pre-orders. Not only will this disc tease players with the Hoth level demo, but it also includes a complete GameCube port of the timeless 1983 *Star Wars* arcade game. We can only hope that LucasArts will offer the same incentive to UK gamers, as we'd jump at the chance to get our hands on Atari's retro masterpiece as part of the deal.





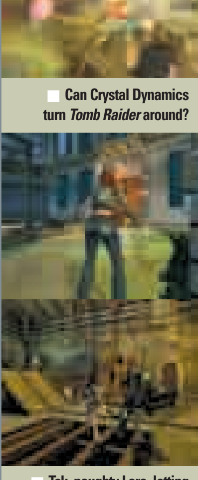
THE NEXT CONSOLE WILL BE OUT IN...

Heavyweight developers like EA are set to receive the first clues as to when the next breed of consoles may be released. "We will know when we begin to get first-generation development systems, because typically we get our hands on those about two years before launch," predicts EA chief executive Larry Probst, who expects to begin work on titles for the new hardware within the next six months. It's likely that the first machine seen by developers could be favourite in the next console war.



LARA PACKS HER BAGS

EIDOS TAKES TOMB RAIDER AWAY FROM CORE AND HANDS THE FRANCHISE OVER TO CRYSTAL DYNAMICS



Can Crystal Dynamics turn *Tomb Raider* around?

Tsk, naughty Lara, letting all your fans down.

Core Design – the creator of Lara Croft – has lost its precious licence to another developer. American-based Crystal Dynamics will be developing future instalments of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, as *Angel Of Darkness* is the first part of a proposed trilogy. An official statement from Eidos offers little comfort for Core's future with the company: "We will now be evaluating Core Design studio's ongoing direction and contribution as part of the group's overall development capabilities". With Core Design's recent non-Lara products failing to perform at retail, we feel that there could be some difficult times ahead for the Derby-based studio.

Problems arose when the highly anticipated *Angel Of Darkness* launched nine months after its original release date. Troubles continued when the game received mixed reviews, and this was quickly followed by the furore caused within the industry when GAME decided to sell the title several days before its official launch date.

Once *Angel Of Darkness* was released, Core's woes began in earnest. Jeremy Heath-Smith, Eidos' development director and Core Design's managing director, announced that he would be resigning from the boards of both companies with immediate effect. While no reason has been given, we suspect the fact that *Angel Of Darkness* missed the end of Eidos' financial year could be a critical factor behind his decision. Movie company Paramount is also blaming Core's tardiness for the fact that its latest film, *Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life*, has been a flop

Eidos' decision to hand the *Tomb Raider* licence over to Crystal Dynamics (creator of the *Legacy Of Kain* series) is a brave move and one that is gaining praise throughout the industry. "Whilst Core certainly did an excellent job creating such a global phenomenon, the secret of any ongoing success is always continued reinvention," says Doug Bone of Andromeda Entertainment Ltd. "Despite being a technically sound development team, Crystal Dynamics has never really had a franchise on the scale of *Tomb Raider*, so this is a shrewd move. I fully expect Miss Croft's next adventure to look, sound and play better than ever and hopefully re-enthuse the fan-base that has been let down by what is the most disappointing game of the year so far."

It's unclear how Core itself feels about recent events, as it has refused to comment.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN…

ACCLAIM'S TROUBLES DEEPEN, BUT IT STILL TAKES BAM! UNDER ITS WING

Acclaim faces further problems following the news that it has six months to ensure that its share price attains the $1 (60p) minimum price that will enable it to stay afloat. This period is an official extension granted by NASDAQ to allow the company to raise funds. This is serious news for Acclaim as despite recently raising $13 million (£8 million), it seems that it has a long way to go if it wants to avoid the same fate as Rage and Crawfish.

In a bid to increase its poor performance, Acclaim has joined forces with BAM! Entertainment, itself a company with major financial troubles. The new deal will see Acclaim publishing several BAM! games in Europe, including *Wallace & Gromit: Project Zoo* and *Dexter's Laboratory*.

"We are pleased to have entered into this agreement with BAM!," said Acclaim CEO Rod Cousens. "Its line-up will enhance our growth in the international territories where the first release, *Wallace & Gromit*, is one of this year's most anticipated titles."

This venture may not be a wise move by Acclaim, but we can't wait to see the cheese-related promotions for *Wallace & Gromit*.



Can a plasticine dog save the day for Acclaim?

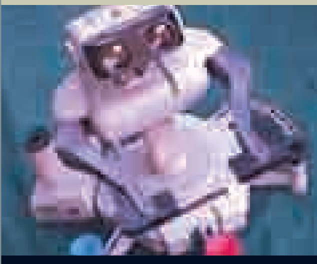
games™ THE TOP FIVE

POINTLESS CONSOLE ACCESSORIES



No.5 SEGA DREAMCAST VMU

A great idea that totally went to waste



No.4 NINTENDO'S R.O.B.

One robot, two games – virtually no fun



No.3 SEGA MEGA 32X

When you can't be arsed with a whole new console



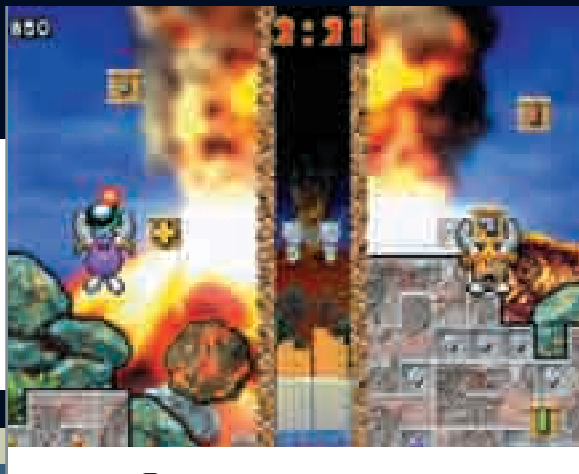
No.2 ATARI JAGUAR CD

Why release an add-on for a console no-one bought?



No.1 NINTENDO POWER GLOVE

The most useless peripheral ever. EVER



MORE CASUALTIES

TWO MORE COMPANIES DEPART THE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY

As a worrying trend continues, yet more software developers have had to quit the industry. Cheadle-based Creative Asylum and Croyden's HotGen have become the latest firms to call it a day.

Creative Asylum had been behind such titles as *Rally Championship* and *Rally Xtreme* for the PC and it seems that its current problems are to do with the cancellation of its *Battlebots* title for the PS2 and GameCube. "We're very sad to see the end of something which we have all put a great deal of our lives into," said Gary Switzer, Creative Asylum's director. "We've greatly enjoyed the past five years working together as a team, and are extremely proud of the contribution we have made in our own small way to the gaming world."

HotGen also appears to be getting ready to close its doors and, with the exception of one development team (currently finishing off an unnamed GBA title), is getting ready to begin liquidation procedures. HotGen formed in 1988 and released games such as *Batman: Dark Tomorrow*, *Jedi Power Battles* and *Eggo Mania*.

These closures are becoming too much of a regular occurrence, but let's hope the lucrative Christmas market can turn some fortunes around.



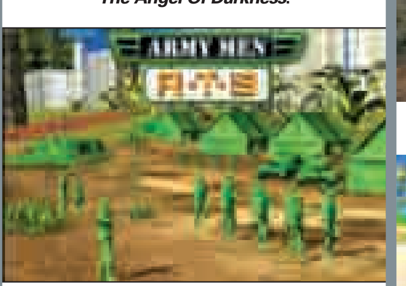
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WOULD YOU BUY IT FOR A DOLLAR?

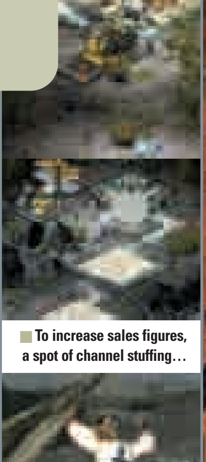
Now that 3DO is finally no more, numerous publishers are already chasing after some of the ill-fated company's more popular franchises. Ubi Soft is after the assets for *Heroes Of Might & Magic*, whilst the likes of Namco Hometek and JoWood are after *SRS Street Racing*. The most bizarre news, however, is that Eidos is after the dreaded *Army Man* franchise. We're not sure if this is to draw flack away from the ongoing poor quality of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, or if Eidos will be giving the series to Core Design as punishment for *The Angel Of Darkness*.



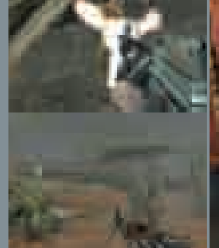


MICROSOFT GOES IT ALONE

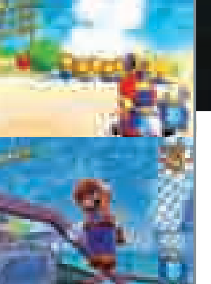
It may have kept a low profile at this year's Electronic Consumer Trade Show (ECTS) but the yearly X0 show will ensure that Microsoft remains on everyone's lips throughout September. Taking place between 16-17 September, X03 will be held in the south of France and should give Microsoft a chance to reveal upcoming software and hardware. Knowing how much it likes to spring surprises, we're expecting to possibly see early details of Xbox 2 and (fingers crossed) at least video footage of *Perfect Dark Zero*. Failing that, we'd be happy playing *Halo 2*, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* and *Project Gotham Racing 2*.

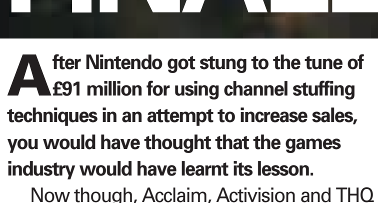


To increase sales figures, a spot of channel stuffing…



…can sort you out without selling anything.





SEC LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION INTO CHANNEL STUFFING

THE GAME'S FINALLY UP?

After Nintendo got stung to the tune of £91 million for using channel stuffing techniques in an attempt to increase sales, you would have thought that the games industry would have learnt its lesson.

Now though, Acclaim, Activision and THQ are all currently being investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) over claims that they have continued to ship games to stores even though the demand isn't there. It's important to note that all companies concerned are currently merely 'helping out with enquiries' at this time, and are only being asked to supply any information "directly related to accounts and accounting practices".

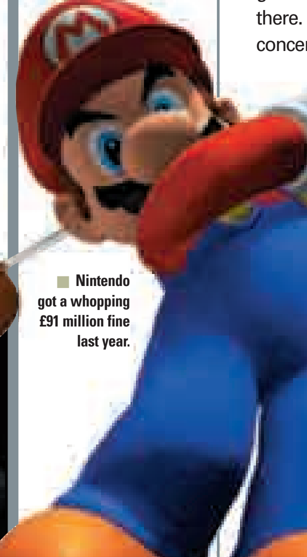
It's quite possible that the SEC's current interest in the industry has arisen from its recent investigation into Take 2. Nearly two year's worth of Take 2's financial figures were handed over to the Commission after an investigation was launched involving rumoured channel stuffing by the publisher and developer. Channel stuffing is the practice of offering dealers and distributors special incentives in an attempt to boost sales at the end of a fiscal year, only to then have the products returned at a later date.

Unsurprisingly, none of the companies involved would state what the SEC are actually investigating and could only offer us a "no comment", but it is expected that none will be facing any fines. It seems more likely that the SEC will instead use this opportunity to force publishers to base sales figures on the actual number of units sold, rather than on the number of games that have been simply shipped to stores. It's also important to remember that it is not only publishers that may come under the ongoing investigation.

The Nintendo case involved several high street stores, including Bergsala AB and John Menzies plc (the latter faced a £4.5 million fine) so it would not be unreasonable for the SEC to approach this current problem from all possible angles. Nintendo's fine was the fourth largest ever to be handed out to a single company and became headline news when it was announced late last year.

With continued rumours that this is simply the beginning of an even wider probe into the whole software industry, we're sure it could be some time before the SEC reveals its results. But we'll let you know what, if anything, it manages to unearth.





Nintendo got a whopping £91 million fine last year.



EYE, EYE

SONY'S EYETOY BECOMES A HUGE SUCCESS



Sony's new peripheral has exceeded expectations and become a huge success throughout the UK. Thanks to some extensive marketing by Sony that has seen the EyeToy appearing on the likes of *Big Brother 4* as well as in numerous retail stores, *EyeToy: Play* has firmly ingrained itself in the public's consciousness, even managing to take the number one spot away from Eidos' *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*.

"For EyeToy to top the charts against stiff competition from the likes of Ms Croft and *The Matrix* is great," said David Wilson, head of PR for SCEUK. "I had faith from the start that this was a brilliant and original piece of kit but it's really good to see that consumers seem to agree. I think EyeToy offers some amazing possibilities for the future."

A second EyeToy product is currently in development and is expected to be released in November, with David Wilson confident that the gadget will "become a major part of PlayStation gaming in future."

The Eyetoy technology is still in its infancy, and although budding skaters will no longer be able to use the peripheral in *Tony Hawk's Underground*, we're sure it won't be long before starring in games is second nature.



Throwing shapes to defeat evil is a popular pastime.

A second EyeToy product is expected in November.

More *Wario Ware*. Woo!



WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

NINTENDO HANDS OUT ANOTHER LICENCE AND ANNOUNCES A MYSTERIOUS NEW PRODUCT

Nintendo seems to be unloading licences like there's no tomorrow. It now appears that Namco has been given the *Donkey Kong* licence and is currently hard at work on *Donkey Kongo*, a drum-based rhythm action title. While little is currently known about the new game, we're expecting it to be based on Namco's popular *Taikou No Tetsujin* (a title which has already sold nearly 700,000 units in Japan) and to appear on the GameCube as well as in selected arcades. Nintendo is handing out its franchises at an alarming rate, and whilst every product has been of a very high standard, we do wonder if the company is starting to run out of ideas.

Although a new *Wario Ware* game and *Zelda* title have been announced, we're more interested in Nintendo's mysterious new product that will be unveiled early next year. With the PSP's arrival drawing ever closer, we're expecting it to be a new handheld to counteract Sony's incoming machine (a successor to the GameCube seems highly unlikely). If the new product is indeed a vastly improved GBA and it's unveiled at ECTS, the coming year could prove very interesting.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO.10: LOOKING GOOD AND KNOWING IT

If you saw issue 6, you'll have seen us venting our spleens about the state of videogames advertising and how it's mainly focused on making games look good, rather than showing how they play. Unfortunately, we've started to notice the same trend in what we're able to show in the mag as well.

Wherever possible, the screenshots you'll see in **games™** will be taken by our own fair hands but, sadly, this isn't always the case. Sometimes we end up having to rely on press shots sent by the publisher and, occasionally, that's where the problems begin; mainly because instead of shots that look like the code, they often end up being high-res poses in a 'not actual footage' stylee. Needless to say, some companies are more guilty of this than others.

But hey, here's a good idea for all you developers – instead of offering obviously posed renders that make your game look pretty, why not show us what it'll look like when we're playing it? That way, maybe we (as people who fork out cash for our games) can decide whether it'll be something we'll like. It's so blindingly obvious, we can't think why it hasn't been done before…



Sony's been using these *Ghosthunter* 'screens', but if those are real PS2 shots, then we're a monkey's uncles.

We can assure you won't see anything like this pose in *FIFA 2004*. So why bother showing it?



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

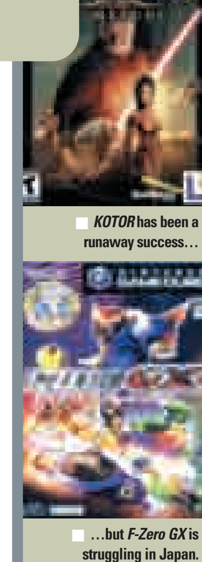


EC TO CHALLENGE GAMING BAN

Greece is finally being confronted over its highly controversial gaming ban. Although the law was initially expected to only concern gambling-related games, it's since been revealed that it covers all forms of videogame entertainment – even those enjoyed in the privacy of Greek gamers' homes. The European Commission has at last decided to challenge the ban on the grounds that the new law was not fully explained in its draft stage and that it also jeopardises the EC's treaty on the free movement of goods and services within the EU.







KOTOR has been a runaway success…

…but *F-Zero GX* is struggling in Japan.

Somehow, *Kirby's Air Ride* has far outsold *F-Zero*.





SELL, SELL, SELL…

MICROSOFT AND NINTENDO'S LATEST BIG GAMES HAVE BEEN RELEASED, BUT THE FIGURES ARE RATHER ODD

July saw arguably two of the biggest game releases of this year in America and Japan, though the sales figures have raised a few eyebrows. Bioware's impressive *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* has been occupying Xbox owners in America, while Japanese gamers have witnessed the fast and frantic gameplay of *F-Zero GX*. *Knights Of The Old Republic* has been a phenomenal success throughout the US and has set a new record for Xbox sales – within the space of just four days, it shifted over 250,000 copies. There's no doubt that the pairing of one of the world's best RPG developers with one of the most popular franchises will ensure that *Knights* could well be the Xbox's system seller until the release of *Halo 2* in 2004.

Unfortunately, *F-Zero GX*, while an exceptional game in its own right, has not achieved anywhere near the same amount of success. Though the franchise has never been one of Nintendo's strongest, even we were surprised when it only managed to achieve fourth place in the Dengeki chart, with just 46,515 units sold. This is particularly galling when you realise that *Kirby's Air Ride* has sold 172,774 units over a three-week period.

Let's just hope that American and European gamers give this title the attention it deserves and maybe it can hang on in the top ten for a little longer.

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH - Ilkka Raiskinen, head of Nokia's Entertainment and Media sector, talks about the Game Boy:

"It's for ten-year-olds – if you're 20 or 25, it's probably not a good idea to pull a Game Boy out of your pocket on a Friday night in a public place"

gamesTM says: Talk about alienating your entire market – why not say anyone with a Game Boy is a loser as well? That'll really help sales of the N-Gage…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

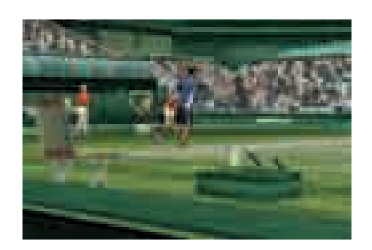
XBOX LIVE: THE NEXT CHAPTER

LIVE DUE FOR ITS FIRST MAJOR UPDATE

Fans of Xbox Live will be pleased to hear that Microsoft's new online service should become available from mid-September. Xbox Live Now will include several enhancements such as the ability to chat to friends from the Xbox dashboard and an improved friends list, making it easier to start up online games. One of the most exciting aspects, however, will be the integration of Microsoft's new sports service.

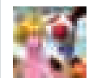
"XSN Sports is a website powered by the same technology as the new Xbox Live website," explained a spokesperson for Microsoft. "It will enable Xbox Live subscribers to create leagues and tournaments for XSN Sports titles that will be arriving later this year."

While this is good news for Live players, it's important to remember that past updates have been constantly delayed, so don't be too surprised if this one arrives a little late…



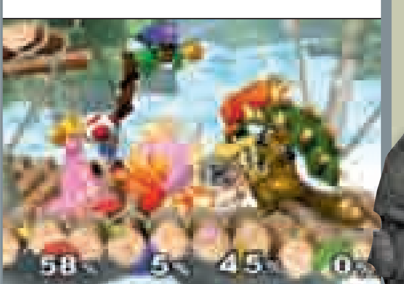


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

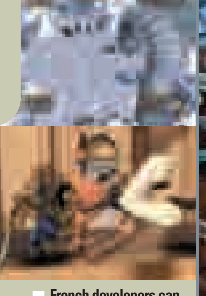


I'M LEAVING

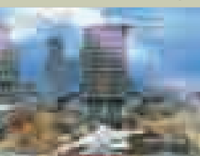
Masahiro Sakurai, the creator of Kirby and director of *Super Smash Bros Melee*, has left HAL Labs after supposedly being unhappy with corporate politics. It's as yet unclear what Sakurai-san intends to do in the future. One option would be to join the 12-strong Okatuku development house that's been created by ex-Capcom producer Yoshiki Okamoto. Despite being offered a position as dean at one of Japan's biggest game development collages, Okamoto-san decided to continue developing games. Okatuku will develop new titles across all major formats.



We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. There are still a few quality games kicking around, so we're sure you'll think of something…



French developers can now cash in on creativity.



FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFERS GRANTS TO SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS



TRÈS BIEN

French software developers are being offered grants of up to €4 million (£2.9 million) in an attempt to develop new game ideas. Grants will also be used to help smaller companies weather what has been a tough year. But before you send off your game proposals, the French Ministry of Culture has created guidelines to ensure that the funds will not be abused. Would-be recipients need to be French and all work on the future titles must be carried out in France. In addition, handouts won't be given to any violent or pornographic games.

"The French Government has recognised that the development of innovative IP [intellectual property] cannot be funded by publishers," said Roger Bennett, director general of the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA). "It's simply too risky for them, illustrated by their scramble for licences in existing successful IP such as in film, sport and other media. Developers find the process equally risky."

Escalating costs for developing new titles are another problem that the French government is hoping to overcome through these grants. "It costs a minimum of £100,000 just to bring a product to some sort of prototype level worthy of presentation," said Bennett. "Creative innovation is drying up, to the extent that UK developers are increasingly becoming contractors for content sections on licensed product."

This isn't the first time that France has offered an incentive to developers. Several years ago, a similar scheme saw the likes of Titus and Infogrames acquiring several companies in an attempt to secure extra funding. But when Titus realised it couldn't fund these acquisitions, it ran into financial difficulties. With this in mind, it'll be interesting to see if history repeats itself and, more importantly, if the grants scheme is something the British government would consider.

"It would be extraordinary for the UK government to provide apparently open-ended hand-outs," said Bennett. "The industry must first help itself if it expect others, including the government, to invest later."



“TO CREATE A GAME IS TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE – IT TAKES EXTREME IMAGINATION AND VISION TO MAKE A TRULY GREAT GAME”

DAVID HAYTER, ACTOR, WRITER, MEMBER OF FOXHOUND

DAVID HAYTER

KONAMI

Most of you have probably played Hideo Kojima’s *Metal Gear Solid*. However, many of you may not know that the man behind the English voice for Solid Snake is a rather interesting individual. From having a solid career in voice acting (for games and anime) to being a particularly accomplished scriptwriter for films such as the *X-Men* franchise, David Hayter is quite a renaissance man.

Born in Santa Monica, California, Hayter moved around during his early years, living in many parts of the US, Canada, Japan and Hong Kong. At the tender age of nine, he decided that he had to be involved in the movies. “I collected comics as a kid,” he explains, “I studied martial arts and, when I was old enough, started riding motorcycles. Basically I wanted to become Batman when I grew up. Fortunately, it hasn’t happened to me yet… growing up, that is.”

Hayter’s interest in comics paid off when he was asked to write the script for the first X-Men movie, which had been a long-held ambition. “I was an only child, who moved every year of my life,” remembers Hayter, “and the X-Men – in their Chris Claremont days – were my closest friends. When I was 15, I used to dream about the X-Men movie, praying that they wouldn’t screw it up. To have the chance to participate in the film and the retention of the integrity of the world was like a dream come true.”

Though he may not have become Batman, David got pretty close when he played the lead role of Sean Barker (a pseudonym that David often uses in real life) in the 1994 film *Guyver: Dark Hero*. Based upon the acclaimed manga opus of Takaya Yoshiki, *Dark Hero* was the second live-action film in the series – the first starred Mark Hamill and was really, really bad. “I loved being the Guyver,” says Hayter. “I did that movie when I was 23 and it really gave me the chance to star in a movie where I actually got to be the hero. I also met my future wife during filming so that worked out well. But my life has changed since then. I’ve now attained a certain amount of success behind the camera, and it’s made me realise how much I don’t want to be recognisably famous.”

Of course, being the Guyver wasn’t the only time David Hayter would play the hero – he also got to play the voice of everyone’s favourite bad-ass Solid Snake (who’s real name is also David, funnily enough) in *Metal Gear Solid* and then again in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*. Concerning the latter, however, many felt that Kojima lost his narrative focus and turned the finale of the second game into a (probably unintentional) post-modern satire. “I tend to agree,” says Hayter, “though I think people were expecting a game just like the last, and Kojima gave them something else. To create a game is to create an atmosphere, compelling characters and action, and an entire world to drop your player into. It takes extreme imagination and vision to make a truly great game and the process forces you to stretch your creative resources to the limit. The world we were dropped into in the second game was far more ethereal than the first, more dream-like. If it was a surprise to most gamers, well, that is what a ground-breaking artist like Kojima is supposed to do.”

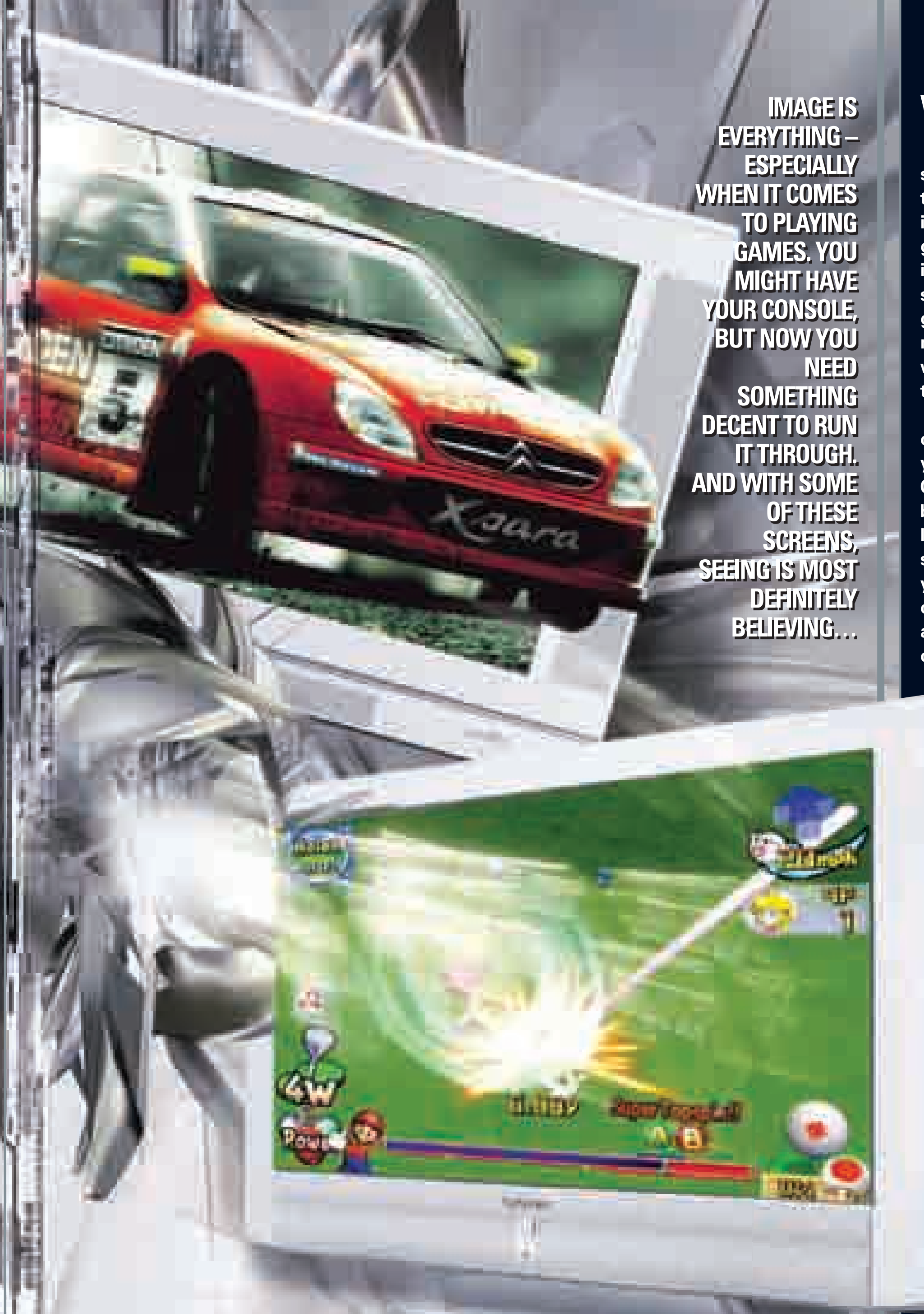
Unsurprisingly, David is also an avid gamer – as well as playing through both *Metal Gear Solid* games (obviously) he also likes to sample other gaming delights. “I try different games, just to give me an idea of what’s out there,” he says. “I try to look for games wherein the created world is fully fleshed out and immersive. I like games where you have the whole world laid out and you can explore it at your whim – like in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, you are a tourist from another world, able to dictate your own course. In something like *Enter The Matrix*, however, you’re forced to follow a pre-determined path. This may feed into the fate/destiny elements of the films, but it also feels as if it limits the experience for me.”

But what about plans for the future? “I’d like to start with world domination, and see where that takes me. Actually, I am pulling all of my varied experience together to put into my directorial debut with the movie *Watchmen*. I’ve also purchased the rights to various books in an effort to put other productions into the pipeline as a producer. In five years, I hope to create a mini-studio around my various efforts, then I can go back to acting. Or retire. Or take up fly-fishing. I also enjoy backgammon. And gaming. But for now, I’ve got plenty on my plate to execute to the fans’ greatest satisfaction.”

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater is due for release on PlayStation2 some time in 2004, while *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* is out on GameCube at the end of this year.



YOU MAY RECOGNISE HIM AS SOLID SNAKE, BUT TO ANYONE THAT KNOWS HIM PROPERLY THE VOICE OF FOXHOUND'S MOST DANGEROUS MEMBER IS ONE OF THE MOST MULTI-FACETED MEN IN THE INDUSTRY…



SCREEN SCENE

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING – ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO PLAYING GAMES. YOU MIGHT HAVE YOUR CONSOLE, BUT NOW YOU NEED SOMETHING DECENT TO RUN IT THROUGH. AND WITH SOME OF THESE SCREENS, SEEING IS MOST DEFINITELY BELIEVING…

While some of you may have considered last issue's coverage of surround sound speaker systems a little excessive, the truth is that you really do need to invest in your equipment set-up if you want to get the best out of your gaming – though it's not always about how much you spend. Of course, while we consider a good sound system to be a must-buy, it's not the first thing you need to consider; without a television to run your console through, you're scuppered.

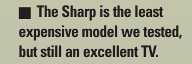
Before you begin, you'll need to decide on a format – this will dictate not only your TV's look, but also the price. Cathode ray tube (CRT) TV is still with us, but now in improved widescreen mode. In fact, buying a bog-standard square-screen TV these days is pretty hard, so your options are limited. Widescreen offers a more natural viewing shape than a square screen and comes closer to offering a cinematic experience, plus more and more games today are supporting widescreen. If you want to be properly modern though, you'll need to get your hands on a sexy plasma – undoubtedly the best-looking big-screen solution with the biggest 'wow' factor. Plasma screens have been coming down in price steadily over recent months and are finally within reach of us normal gamers, so it's certainly something you should consider.

Still, no matter which one you choose, the good news is that screens are the easiest piece of equipment to set up, mainly because you have your own failsafe testing device (yes, those are your eyes) to ensure the very best quality is being squeezed out of your kit. We've covered four of what we consider to be the top televisions around, each of which fall into a different category and price bracket. Take a look and see if one's suitable for you…

TRIED AND TESTED

SHARP 28HW53H

- **Price:** £400
- **Screen Size:** 28-inch
- **Flat Screen:** No
- **Refresh Rate:** 50Hz
- **SCARTS (RGB):** 3 (2)
- **Audio:** NICAM
- **Available From:** Sharp (0800 1385051)



■ The Sharp is the least expensive model we tested, but still an excellent TV.



First, the bad news – this Sharp television is designed to give the appearance of being a flatscreen, a trick it doesn't really pull off. It doesn't matter though, because it's still a very good-looking set (even if the frame is a bit too chunky).

Surprisingly, connectivity is impressive for a set at this price – three SCART sockets on the rear of the set can cover most eventualities, including an RGB signal. This is great news for gamers who own more than one console or have a separate DVD player. Under a drop panel on the front frame, a further set of AV connections allows a temporary source like a camcorder or console to be used with either S-Video or composite signals. Setting up the television itself is easily done via the on-screen menu, which is easy to navigate and has pictograms to simplify matters further.

The high-quality picture is naturally dark, which is great for most games, though the picture can be brightened without affecting the quality if the game is too overcast (*Splinter Cell*, for example). Colours are accurately represented (vibrant reds are a particular strong point) and clarity is superb. In terms of audio, the stereo sound isn't the best on offer here, but it's clear and has a definite space despite the close proximity of the left and right channels. Still, we'd recommend an additional sound system to complement the picture. Overall though, this is a fine television from Sharp, with much to recommend it.

TOSHIBA 42WT29

- **Price:** £1689.99
- **Screen Size:** 42-inch
- **Flat Screen:** Yes
- **Refresh Rate:** 100Hz
- **SCARTS (RGB):** 3 (0)
- **Audio:** Dolby Digital
- **Available From:** Toshiba (08704 424424)

Carrying TVs around is one of the more laborious tasks that befalls the games™ team, which is perhaps justification for our attraction to plasma screens. Thankfully, Toshiba's new Super Screen range carries lightweight rear-projection technology and the result is a TV that's as easy on the arm as it is on the eye. Of course, no shelving means you've got to find somewhere else to put your console, but if you want your TV to stand out, this will certainly fill up a corner of the room.

A great collection of connection selections makes it very easy to hook up the TV. Also, the speaker system that accompanies the 42WT29 is fine to get started with – it delivers an impressive stereo performance, boosted by Dolby Pro-Logic II that projects a sharp sound. Toshiba has included a pair of speakers in the package that are intended for use as rears wired directly into the TV, so by making the most of the subwoofer output, the illusion of a complete surround is as close as a standalone TV can offer.

Sadly, the picture doesn't always match the price tag, as the set struggles with contrast and some background detail. However, the colours are warm and vibrant and the difference is clearly noticeable in games such as *Jet Set Radio: Future* and *GTA: Vice City*. The 42WT29 delivers a solid performance – to the unscrupulous eye, the flaws will seem minimal and this package, boosted by excellent audio, has a lot to offer.

PLUG AND PLAY OF COURSE, HAVING A GOOD TELEVISION IS ONLY HALF THE JOB – YOU'LL NEED THE RIGHT CABLES TOO…



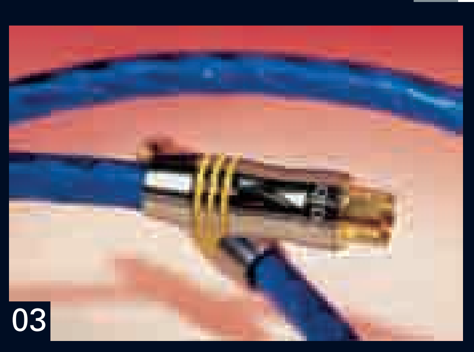
01

Arguably giving the best picture possible, the red, green and blue sockets split the video signal into three separate streams to ensure that there's as little interference as possible. Because they only outputs video though, you'll need to get some audio cables as well.



02

SCART connection is the basic pin plug connector that links your console, DVD player or video to the TV. It offers a simple yet high-quality method of feeding S-Video or RGB video signals, as well as allowing audio up to a Pro-Logic quality. Great for beginners.



03

Another high-quality video option that requires a separate audio cable – S-Video is a dramatic improvement in quality over bog-standard composite but, as the colour signals aren't separated, the quality isn't quite as good as that of RGB SCART. However, the cables are fairly cheap.

TRIED AND TESTED

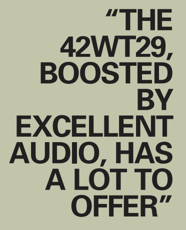
PHILIPS 36PW9767

Price:	£2,000
Screen Size:	36-inch
Flat Screen:	Yes
Refresh Rate:	100Hz
SCARTS (RGB):	4 (2)
Audio:	Dolby Digital
Available From:	Philips (08709 009070)

This top-of-the-line Philips 36PW9767 TV, which incorporates unique Pixel Plus technology, has been graced with brand new styling. The sleek silver casing (complete with matching stand) places the emphasis on style as well as performance.

If it's cold, hard stats that get you drooling, then this TV has enough to keep you happy for a long time. Pixel Plus features advanced picture processing software that doubles today's standard of 1,024 (pixel horizontal) x 625 (line vertical resolution) PAL by producing a matchless 2,048 x 833 presentation. What this means is an increase in picture depth, so the image looks fantastic. Audio is also up to scratch, with built-in subwoofers and wireless surround speakers using their Dolby Digital 5.1 status to full effect.

Pixel Plus is great for slower games such as RPGs but fast-moving images will tempt even the best processing techniques to flicker and appear disjointed. Fortunately, the 'Double Lines' mode offers rich and vibrant colours with fantastic sharpness and a total absence of visible picture lines, providing exceptional performance with fast games like *Pro Evo 2*. Mix this with all the audio/visual functions you can imagine and the Philips 36PW9767 is simply miles ahead of the competition.



"THE 42WT29, BOOSTED BY EXCELLENT AUDIO, HAS A LOT TO OFFER"

"FRESH FROM THE BOX, THE STYLE OF THE KZ32-TS1E GIVES IT A HEAD START"

■ The Philips 36PW9767 uses the latest Pixel Plus technology to good effect.

SONY KZ32-TS1E

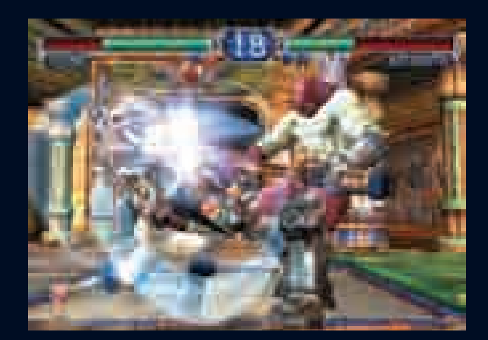
Price:	£4,500
Screen Size:	32-inch
Flat Screen:	Yes
Refresh Rate:	100Hz
SCARTS (RGB):	2 (2)
Audio:	NICAM
Available From:	Sony (08705 111999)

Fresh from the box, the style of the KZ32-TS1E gives this set a head start, though we still can't believe it's a 32-inch screen not a 28-inch one. The simple menu system offers a fairly standard selection of options; along with three picture and colour modes, there's also space to save personalised settings and several screen shift adjustments. The quality of the audio performance is enhanced by plenty of fine-tuning choices as well, with all the adjustments visible and audible without having to lose the menus.

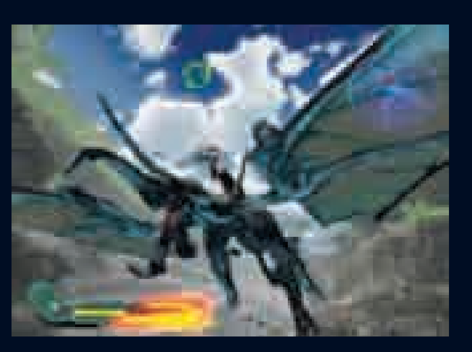
The toasting glow of the screen has excellent support from great precision and fluency. The 100Hz refresh rate justifies its flicker-free claims with a smooth image throughout, spoilt only by the crisp edges and sharp characters that savage the screen in more fast-paced action games. What's more, an excellent stereo display draws a surprisingly widened sound.

The KV32-TS1E has all the connections, components and features you'll need for an excellent gaming TV. Throw good sound and a sweet picture into the equation and you've got an almost perfect solution. The only curiosity is how this adds up to just £4,500. With quality like this, it could afford to set its sights much higher.

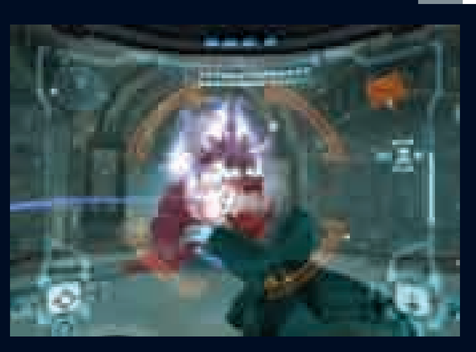
I WANT MY HDTV PROGRESSIVE SCAN IS ALL THE RAGE – ALL THE BEST GAMES SUPPORT IT NOWADAYS



Knowing that looks were all-important for its latest arcade conversion, Namco has made sure that all three versions of *Soul Calibur II* (PS2, Xbox and GameCube) support Progressive Scan, so that every sword strike and defensive blow looks as sharp as possible.



As unappreciated as it was beautiful, SEGA's update of the classic *Panzer Dragoon* concept is a game that really shines when run through Progressive Scan. The lush backgrounds and highly detailed enemies become all the more vivid thanks to the improved clarity of the picture.



Nintendo's epic *Metroid Prime* needs the best of everything to truly shine – a booming surround sound system to create the atmosphere and a Progressive Scan-compatible television to ensure that Samus' surroundings look as dark and menacing as possible. It really is the only way to play…

SEEING THE **BIGGER** PICTURE

While we don't want to state the obvious, the first prerequisite for any console owner is that you need something to play your games on. Of course, years ago you had two choices – either a good old CRT box or an expensive and bulky rear projector. Thankfully, we've come a long way since then and there's a whole new set of options for the screen-needy, catering for a range of increasingly deep pockets.

CRT

The oldest TV technology on sale today, but also still the best. Improvements in CRT have ensured that it remains both the most pleasing and the cheapest of visual displays.

These days, nearly all CRTs come with widescreen as standard – being the size-conscious folks we are, we'd consider a 28-inch widescreen TV the minimum requirement for any self-respecting gamer.

A flat screen is a bonus as it reduces reflections, and if you can get 100Hz scanning thrown in as well you're looking at a top-notch TV. As with all screens, connectivity is of great importance. Make sure your TV has at least three SCART sockets with at least two able to support an RGB signal – the ideal input for your average console. If not, consider buying a separate SCART switching box.



REAR PROJECTORS



Looking more like some kind of American über-television than the more conventional units, rear-projection television sets use projector technology and come in LCD/DLP and CRT varieties. Although we recommend you get a demo of any product you buy, rear projectors are essential if you're planning to show off to your friends – however, the image is very much a matter of taste.

The biggest problem from a gamer's point of view, however, is potential burn damage to the actual screen (although lowering contrast and brightness can help to combat this). Although not hugely popular, rear-projection remains a cost-effective way to achieve big-screen results.

PLASMA/LCD



Plasma is the must-have product for the style-conscious lounge owner. Seducing with their skinny looks and huge screens, they're perfect for the obsessive gamer. Plasmas come in 32-, 42-, 50- and 61-inch varieties, with a few less popular sizes in between.

Straddling the corporate display and home entertainment markets, it's not unusual to find some odd-looking connectors around the back that you'll never need if you're just using it for consoles.

More recently, high-tech (but smaller) LCD screens have started to appear. Looking just like plasma and with the same benefits, it's only the technology that separates them. Sadly, LCD has not come as far in terms of contrast capability and has yet to drop below the £200 mark.

JARGON BUSTER

CRT
The cathode ray tube (CRT) is the base technology for all televisions and some projectors – needless to say, it's been around for ages although technology has improved over the years.

LCD
Liquid crystal display (LCD) is used in many applications from calculators through to 40-inch television screens. An array of coloured pixels can be switched on and off individually, creating a very detailed image.

HDTV
The latest wave of TV technology, High-Definition Television is yet to become a mainstream format – most probably because HDTV sets currently retail for several thousand pounds.

100HZ SCANNING
Standard TVs refresh their image 50 times every second – 100Hz scanning doubles this refresh rate, resulting in a more stable image. This in no way affects your TV's ability to handle NTSC signals though, so import fanatics needn't worry.

PROGRESSIVE SCAN
A technique used by all HDTVs that replaces the more conventional interlacing technique employed by current televisions. It offers a brighter picture thanks to the increased number of scan lines visible.

YPRPB/YCRCB/RGB/COMPONENT
Component video is best because it keeps the raw red, green and blue signals from a video source separate. RGB is wasteful as some of the picture information on each signal is the same, so YPrPb or YCrCb are used because they're more efficient.

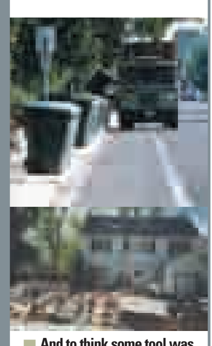
SCREEN BURN
Normally associated with rear-projection or plasma screens, screen burn arises when a static image is displayed on the television for an extended period, leaving the image 'burnt' onto the screen.

gamesTM USA REPORT

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"THE WORD 'DISPOSABLE' HAS NEW MEANING; SOMETHING ONE IS ADVERTISED ON TV AND YOU'VE GOT ROOM FOR IT ON A



And to think some tool was going to chuck this lot away



For the longest time, I was perplexed by the gargantuan piles of crap at the end of people's driveways. Grand homes with well-manicured lawns, multiple cars and the requisite post-9/11 American flags; clean houses kept freshly painted yet oddly soiled by mountains of random flotsam out there on the pavement. Big items: fridges, sofas, weight benches, baby strollers, floor-standing speakers, bikes, computer chairs, televisions – all dumped on top of each other, left out in the rain. The same houses always have a pile, though the stuff changes. What they're doing, week after week, is throwing their gear out at a terrific rate, refreshing the contents of their homes to the beat of the seasons.

So much is available so cheaply that nothing old has any value any more. It's all left for the garbage truck; nothing donated to charity thrift stores, nothing sold used, nothing given to family or friends perhaps setting up their own places. After all, they can get their own new stuff. The word 'disposable' has new meaning – something is disposable the moment a better one is advertised on TV and you've got room for it on a credit card. It's an endless cycle. I own boots that have generously outlived the entire contents of some of these houses, from the carpet on the floor to the lights on the ceiling. This convention only has to work to your advantage once, of course, to turn from sickening excess to reasonable upkeep.

A friend of mine – I believe we are 'buddies', as this is how I am addressed during Team Capture-The-Bag on *TimeSplitters 2* – called up one bright 90-degree afternoon. "Watcha doin' right now?" he asked. I mentioned something about trying to convert quantities of raw ingredients into what Mrs Shape had promised would become French toast at the end. This, being iniquitously more complicated than instant noodles, had not gone well.

"Come on over here real quick," he said, "I just want to know if you want something." Ten minutes later, I was in his basement. Surrounded by dozens of big freshly-disturbed U-Haul boxes, he was smiling broadly. "I just ordered a new PC," he beamed. "It's the fastest one Dell makes – 3.6 gigahertz processor, two gig of RAM, 21-inch monitor. It's costing me nearly five thousand dollars! I wondered if you wanted all this stuff."

He indicated two large Rubbermaid hampers with a cardboard box on top. All three vessels were jammed full of Nintendo kit, everything from 1985 to 1996. The room seemed to get bright, and I realised I was feeling woozy, a growing metallic ringing in my ears. Two NES consoles with pads, Super Controller overlays, Zapper lightguns and a Zoomer wheel. Two Super Nintendos – one still boxed – with more guns, pads and cables. Two original chubby white Game Boys with, God bless it, *Tetris* amongst their cartridges. A very dusty N64 rounded out the set, as well as an entire storage bin full of games for all machines.

As I sorted through my spoils, sitting amongst boxes of toys and the sort of pap you always wonder who buys (like

IS DISPOSABLE THE MOMENT A BETTER CREDIT CARD. IT'S AN ENDLESS CYCLE"

decorative plates painted with Dalmatians in fire hats), I wondered: who could do without all this cool Nintendo gear? You could pick most of it up for pennies, yes, but there were gaming classics such as the *Mario*s that you can't ever replace with *Half-Life 2* on your whiz-bang new PC. You'd have to be mad, right? Then again, maybe I'm the crazy one for hoarding this plastic junk like gold. Just at this moment, my friend happened upon an old wallet down there amid the heaps of possessions being chucked out to make way for the new übercomputer. He withdrew a little photograph, holding it where I could see. "That's my ex-wife," he said before, without warning, stabbing the picture with a compass. "Bitch."

At that point, I decided against questioning the sanity of unloading a veritable Nintendo museum. Abruptly, I realised why there were two of everything: the legacy of a broken Nintendo family. Once, they must have sat laughing together, playing this grimy cart of the *Jeopardy* quiz show; now they're stabbing each others' photographs. Maybe I was meant to learn that every pile of trash tells a story. But I think what I really learned was that I enjoy not having to buy *Choplifter III*, *Mario All Stars* and *Ninja Gaiden*. Thanks, buddy.

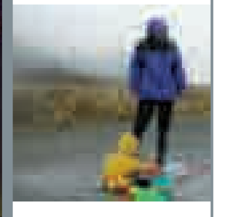
Many thanks





MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Short summers



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Chevrolet Corvettes



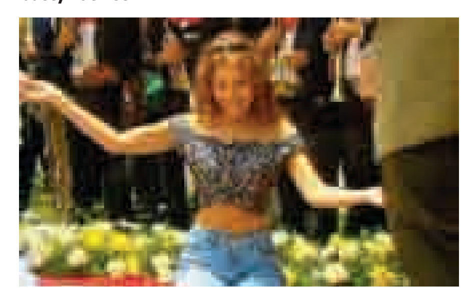
WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

SUPER SABADO SENSACIONAL

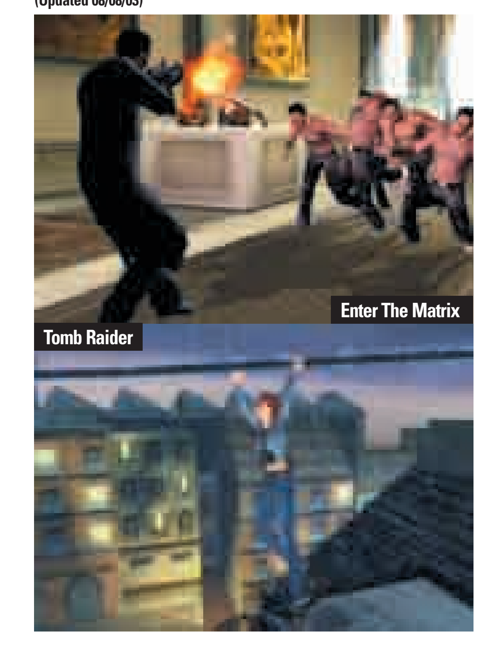
Deliriously pleasing Saturday morning Spanish-language TV show. Three hours of spontaneous dances, *Fear Factor*-type challenges, singing and busty Latinos.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Enter The Matrix	Atari	Multi
2	Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	Multi
3	The Hulk	Vivendi	Multi
4	NBA Street Vol. 2	EA Sports BIG	Multi
5	Brute Force	Microsoft	Xbox
6	Donkey Kong Country	Nintendo	GBA
7	Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
8	Midnight Club II	Rockstar	Multi
9	Disney's Finding Nemo	THQ	Multi
10	Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition	Konami	GBA

(Updated 08/08/03)



Enter The Matrix

Tomb Raider



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

"JAPANESE GAME TRENDS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS SHORT-LIVED, PERRY'S BRAIN FART AT OFF-PUTTINGLY LOW PRICES PROVES

Those with any sense of continuity may remember my totally justified slamming of the banal piece of gaming trash that is *Enter The Matrix*. Many may also laugh their arse off at the fact that the damn game has practically blitzed the Japanese charts. Obviously, this leaves me with much egg and nutty brown stuff all over my face. So I'll do the mandatory back peddling here and fervently explain that the Japanese charts aren't that indicative of gaming trends as they are in Blighty, but I'm pretty sure that the damage has already been done in any case. Regardless of my slight lack of foresight, we still have a very uncomfortable problem on our hands.

Firstly, we all agree that Shiny's *Enter The Matrix* is a particularly naff piece of software. Yes? Good. Secondly, it sold by the bucketload – this is not so good. But the question is: why did this happen? The fact is, movies that make it into game form sell. A lot. In Japan, the same can be said for anime (and manga too, but to a more limited extent). The difference between Western and Eastern game design philosophies is that most Western game developers simply can't be bothered to plough all their efforts into a mediocre and derivative game, due to the fact that some affluent film executive is calling the shots rather than their own bustling creativity. In Japan, they love it.

More accurately, the Japanese are discipline fetishists. They approach seemingly banal projects with mystifying zeal. Moreover, they care about anime and also do their damnedest to create a game worthy of the parent opus. Admittedly, they don't get it right all the time, but their track record is pretty solid. So I can only assume that with *Enter The Matrix* Japanese gamers expected the same level of quality – or at least for the game to be fairly solid.

Much like Squeenix's *The Bouncer* though, *Enter the Matrix* quickly became available in second-hand game stores; often a portent of morbid disaster for any game. The initial sales were admittedly bloody impressive, but they haven't been consistent, to the extent that many of the smaller retail outfits may take a loss due to Shiny's antics – my local game store pretty much confirmed this dire state of affairs, as indicated by their orders of mandatory hara-kiri for all non-essential staff so as to cut overheads. To be fair, this isn't all that suggestive of anything really; Japanese game trends are almost always very short-lived, but to see racks and racks of Dave Perry's brain fart at really very off-puttingly low prices proves that something just isn't right.

■ Okay, so we'll let Bond off the hook because *GoldenEye* was great. But other licensed game stars had better watch out…



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TEN: JAPANESE AIRPORT CUSTOMS

I have nothing to declare	Shinkoku surumonowa nanimo arimasen
They're just audio CDs	Korewa tadano ongakuno CD desu
You don't need to see my identification…	Mibun syomeisyo o minakutemoiindesuka
These aren't the copies of *Radiant Silvergun* that you're looking for…	Korewa anatagasagashiteru rediento *Radiant Silvergun* siruba gan no kopii jya arimasenyo…

BUT TO SEE RACKS OF DAVE SOMETHING ISN'T RIGHT"

So, where does this leave us? Certainly bruised and a wee bit battered, but otherwise just a little wiser. Sadly, games of movies are a necessary evil for the infancy of this industry, maybe even a rite of passage. One thing, however, is certain – gaming must survive this onslaught of insidious vapidity and move onto its own creatively greener pastures.

We all know that games of movies aren't always dire – as the likes of Rare's superb *GoldenEye* attest – so it can be done. By now though, many a frustrated games designer will be sharpening their Dreamcast fishing rod so as to bring this particular columnist to a speedy and probably very bloody demise. Indeed, I am blissfully ignorant of the idiocies of management within the games industry. To that, I have no defence, but for the very creators to give up in the face of moronic management is a bit sad. The Japanese can and often do have to put up with the soul-crushing idiocy of their superiors, yet they come out okay… most of the time. Maybe it's time we finally bit the bullet and ultimately kicked arse?

Kind regards



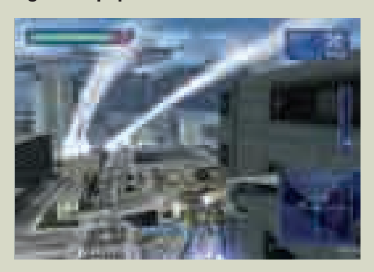


■ Did we mention how bad *ETM* is? Oh, we did. Okay…



BIG STOMPY ROBOTS OF DEATH

While it doesn't happen very often, there's occasionally a glimmer of hope for anime fans and gamers like me. SEGA AM2 is currently nearing completion of *Chojikyu Yosai Macross*, a game that covers the events of the original 1982 TV series and 1984 movie. Moreover, it will most likely be the first 3D *Macross* game that doesn't utterly suck. Utilising AM2's AeroDancing engine, initial screenshots look very promising and show that both atmospheric and space combat have finally been properly implemented. Naturally, my current personal level of excitement for this is utter orgasmic joy – although after *Macross M3*, can you really blame me? So if you please, I'd appreciate it if you could raise your glass to Roy-sempai and get ready to listen to some eighties J-pop choons in the near future…



JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Mobile Suit Gundam Seed	Bandai	PS2
2	Pokémon Pinball Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
3	Tales Of Phantasia	Namco	GBA
4	Jikkyou Powerful Pro Baseball 10	Konami	PS2
5	Guilty Gear XX Reload	Sammy	PS2
6	Shutokou Battle 01	Genki	PS2
7	Super Mario Advance 4	Nintendo	GBA
8	Kirby's Air Ride	Nintendo	GC
9	K-1 World Grand Prix	Konami	PS2
10	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	GC

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 08/08/03)



Mobile Suit Gundam Seed

Pokémon Pinball

Tales Of Phantasia

"WE'RE TRYING TO GET OURSELVES OUT OF THE VIDEOGAME WORLD AND INTO THE ENTERTAINMENT SPORTS WORLD"

RORY ARMES, EA SPORTS

RORY ARMES

EA SPORTS

Ignore what the ladies tell you, gentlemen – size really is everything, particularly if you're a software developer. From the lofty heights of its ivory gaming tower, Electronic Arts manages to overshadow everyone in the industry, although how it managed to get there in the first place through a regular diet of 'same game, different number' titles is something that has wrinkled a few noses. However, while there may be more than a few rehashed skeletons in the company's closet, the powers that be are starting to realise you need a bit more than some updated stats to make a new game. Besides, you can't deny that it's taken an awful lot of work to get the firm to where it is today…

"I think it's all about internal development," says Rory Armes, executive producer and vice-president of the EA Sports group. "Whether it's *FIFA*, *Madden*, *NBA Live* or *NHL*, they're all done by an internal group, which I think is the cornerstone to our strategy. If you look at a sports game that has to reiterate itself in a nine or ten-month period, it would be very difficult if you were an external developer to consistently develop an innovative product every time. However, the infrastructure here gives us a real edge; there's about 350 of us all working on various sports games, so we can share all the best practices amongst ourselves. If anyone has a problem, there are another 349 people to discuss it with and other teams to observe to see how they do it, rather than just the regular 30 or 40 people you have on most development teams."

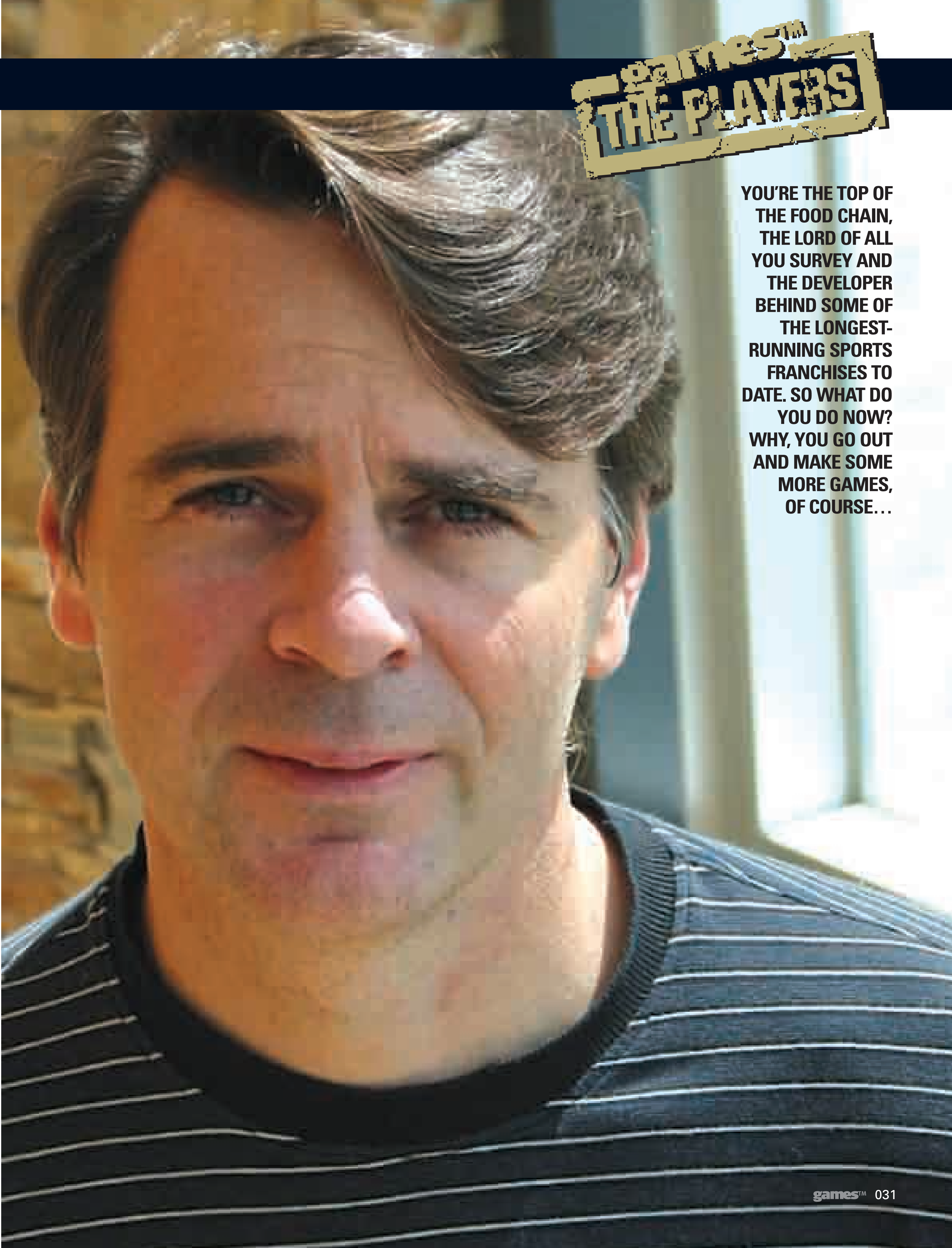
Having more people to bounce thoughts off is certainly something that has done EA Sports' franchises the world of good – at least in terms of keeping them going for so long. Of course, that doesn't solve the problem of finding a place to start when it comes to thinking up the next wave of sports titles; something that has proved challenging, even for a seasoned developer such as EA.

"It was hard a couple of years ago when we were struggling to decide where we wanted to take our sports titles," says Armes. "In the last couple of years though, we've built up a vision of where sports games should go today. We just have to find ways of getting the maximum out of the current consoles to take us where we want to go. We're trying to get ourselves out of the videogame world and into the entertainment sports world – it's all in the gameplay and the motion, in order to make it as authentic as possible. For instance, there's always going to be an awful lot of work needed on AI and animation, so you look at it and go 'okay, well, what we can do, we need to bring out the behavioural models more and we need to bring out the physics models more'. We've really kind of just started working on those and I think we're only just beginning to scratch the surface of it all; we've just got into a frame of mind that these games can be unbelievable, if we're willing to really try."

No doubt the more cynical among you will be taking this with a pinch of salt, but it does seem clear that EA is really making an effort with its upcoming titles. We have some confidence that this year's efforts won't end up being just another bunch of numbers – instead, we can hope to see something a bit more original. But while we're all busy with the 2004 range, the top brass at EA already have their sights set on the years beyond – and one aspect in particular has caught the company's eye.

"Now that the consoles are really kicking in with their online functions, I believe we're going to see a massive curve of adoption among console users," insists Armes. "In the next couple of years, you're going to see a phenomenal leap into an online community, with people from all over the globe not just competing against one another, but also forming friendships and proving that gaming really is a social thing. There's a tremendous amount that we can do in the next couple of years, bringing our games into homes around the world and, up to now, I don't think we've done that. That's why games like *FIFA 2004* are really into that. Hopefully, people will realise that it's something new and different, without breaking the mould of being an authentic football game."

The next wave of EA Sports titles – including *NHL 2004*, *FIFA 2004* and *Madden NFL 2004* – is due out in November. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* is reviewed on page 122.



YOU'RE THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN, THE LORD OF ALL YOU SURVEY AND THE DEVELOPER BEHIND SOME OF THE LONGEST-RUNNING SPORTS FRANCHISES TO DATE. SO WHAT DO YOU DO NOW? WHY, YOU GO OUT AND MAKE SOME MORE GAMES, OF COURSE…



COMMUNITY

THIS MONTH, **games™** CATCHES UP WITH THE NEW KID ON THE EASTERN BLOC, ILLUSION SOFTWORKS, AT ITS BUSY STUDIO

GAMES™ HEADS OUT TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND FINDS A COMPANY FULL OF EASTERN (EUROPEAN) PROMISE, JUST WAITING TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD…

ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

Location, location, location – it's all that matters, or so we're told. Not surprisingly though, there's an exception to every rule, and in this case the exception proved to be an up-and-coming Czech software developer working out of his bedroom. But establishing a new development house in somewhere as unlikely as the Czech Republic, for example, does come with a few advantages – the distinct lack of competition in the area is something that proved particularly useful when Illusion Softworks was setting up shop. "There were no professional developers in the Czech Republic before Illusion Softworks," reveals Petr Vochozka, CEO of Illusion Softworks, "so we had the advantage of the best people in the Czech Republic joining us. In the beginning, we were shy to tell the world that we are from Eastern Europe, but now after the success of our games and that of other Eastern European developers such as Bohemia Interactive [responsible for *Operation Flashpoint*], I do not see any reason why we shouldn't shout about the fact that we are from the Czech Republic. I feel it's an advantage to come from here – sure, it's harder to break through when you not in the US or UK but, as we and others have proved, it's not impossible."

Low overheads have also benefited the company and, as producer Lukas Kure points out, the studio's independence is a ba

Illusion Softworks is an ever-growing developer based in the Czech Republic, signed exclusively to Take2 with the sole purpose of making 'really good, solid games'.

Hidden And Dangerous 2 is the company's 'next big thing', with development due to end shortly before the end of the year. And if we don't want to wait that long…?

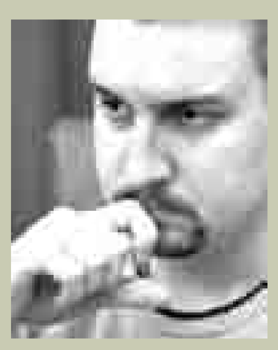
"LOCATION IS JUST GEOGRAPHY – AT THE END OF THE DAY IT'S GREAT GAMES THAT COUNT"
LUKAS KURE, ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

great boon. "The fact that we've been able to establish a number of top-quality game brands has kept us going while some smaller studios have suffered," he says. "As an independent developer, we're able to have a great deal more influence on the final game than many in-house teams. However, while some studios often feel that their end goal differs from that of the publisher, we're fortunate in that we have a close relationship with Take 2 [Illusion has been working with Take 2 for five years] and we've always been able to work well together to produce some very good PC games."

Illusion's growth since being founded in 1997 – through a combination of Vochozka's hard work and investment from venture capital investors the Cash Reform Group – is a testament to how untapped the Eastern European development industry really is. From humble beginnings in a small office (where Vochozka worked alone, making Amiga and PC titles with students or translating English games for the Czech market) to a team of four employees and finally to the 170-strong company it is today, Illusion was the undercurrent for what is proving to be a tidal wave of change throughout the development industry. "For a while, it was American, Japanese and British companies that dominated game development," admits Kure, "and some of the world's most famous developers are based in these territories. However, the world is a big place and as technology reaches all corners of the globe, so does its use and development. There are now development studios based all around the world from Africa and China to Iceland and Eastern Europe. You may have to fight a little harder to be heard in the first place if you're not on the doorstep of many publishers, but those in the know will spot a great team and a great game anyway. Location is just geography – at the end of the day, it's great games that count."

It's true that a good game is a good game, regardless of where it comes from, but it's still relatively impressive to see that one single company can produce such a mixture of well-received titles without stumbling. Of course, this could be attributed to the fact that many of Illusion's titles have been based on the concept of war, something that appears to be the current hot topic in both development circles and with the gaming public going on how many war-based titles we've seen either in development or actually on the shelves recently. But Vochozka believes that this is merely a passing trend. "The same thing happened four years ago with real-time strategy games," he says. "In one Christmas period alone, we had 50 new launches

"3D GAMING IS WHERE OUR STRENGTHS LIE AND THIS IS WHERE WE INTEND OUR FOCUS TO STAY"
PETR VOCHOZKA, ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

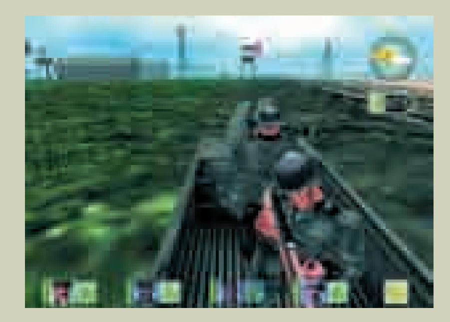


THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE VIETNAMESE

Though Illusion Softworks is a fairly new company, it already has a number of highly regarded titles to its name.

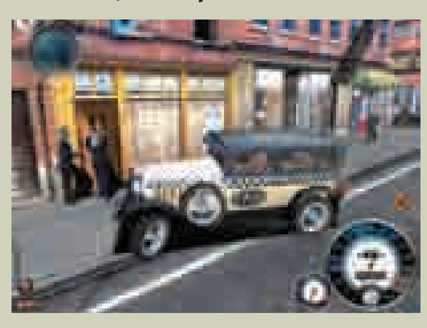
HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS [PC, 1999]

The game that put Illusion Softworks on the map as well as being one of the first to start the current trend of war games, thanks to its team-based gameplay pitting Allied troops against the Nazis. The sequel is currently in development.



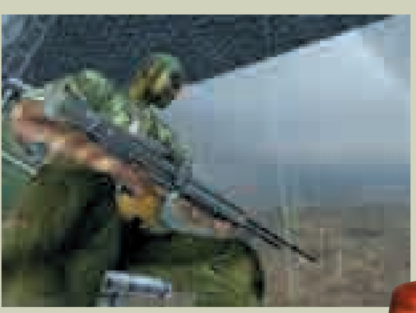
MAFIA: THE CITY OF LOST HEAVEN [PC, 2002]

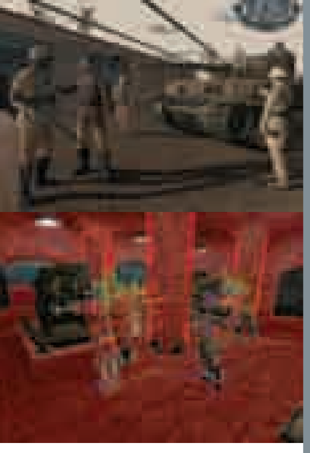
Despite the constant setbacks that *Mafia* faced during development, the game still earned much critical acclaim. Currently in development for consoles, *Mafia* is a more mature *GTA*-style title – more serious, but with just as much bloodshed.



VIETCONG [PC, 2003]

Developed with Pterodon, *Vietcong* ventured away from the third-person viewpoint and into the more traditional FPS style of most war-based titles. Rather than applying the usual WWII standards, the game places gamers in the heart of the south-east Asian jungle during the Vietnam war.





Mmm, technical. Obviously, you won't see any of this in the finished game. Honest.

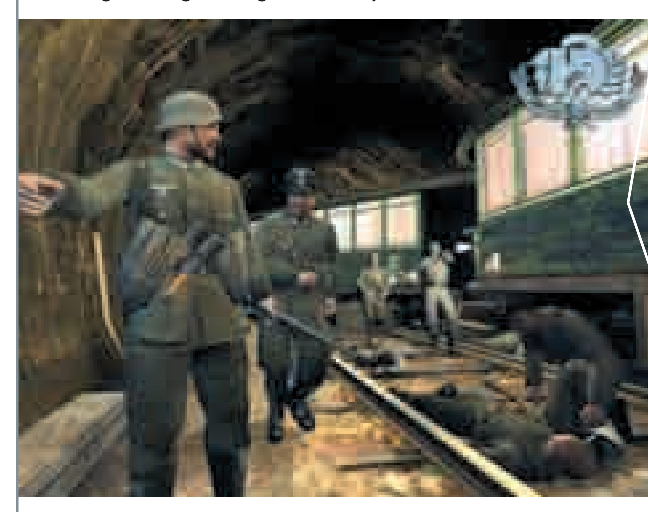




“WE'RE NOT WORRIED THAT THE IDEAS BARREL WILL RUN DRY – WE'RE TOO BUSY RELOADING IT”
LUKAS KURE, ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

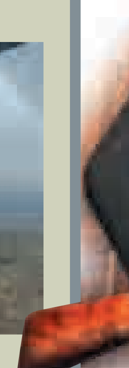
DANGEROUS LIAISON

Currently in development for release towards the end of the year, *Hidden And Dangerous 2* heralds a huge step forward for the series that put Illusion on the map in the first place. “Many things are improved,” says Vochozka, clearly pleased with progress so far, “but the thing we are most proud of is the strategic map. It's not an external map any more – the camera goes up now, so you can still see every tree, bush and stone. You can issue commands in real-time and see the units moving, or you can pause the game and control everything carefully, set waypoints and signals, then unpause and see everything unfold. Or, of course, you can pick one guy and go for it from a first-person perspective. We are curious to see which will be the preferred route for players – whilst I think it will be compelling to finish the game just using one method, though, I believe most players will combine the various styles and use them together to get through successfully.”



on the shelves, all of the same style of game. The wave begins with one massive success – for war games I guess this would have been *Commandos*, *Rainbow Six*, *Spec Ops* or maybe even *Hidden And Dangerous* – then nothing happens for two or three years while developers silently work away at their influenced titles, unaware of other competition. Then, all of a sudden, as projects near completion, you end up seeing at least one new game announced every week. If it's where the money is, every publisher wants to have at least one of these games.”

So are we likely to suffer, er, overkill and see war games go the way of the RTS genre in the near future? Probably not, according to Kure, as we seem to be a bloodthirsty lot. “There will always be a desire for games based on war,” he says, “whether the current trend puts them in the forefront of everybody's minds or not – I think it's natural that things fade and return. Here at Illusion though, we have so many game ideas it's untrue and it can be difficult at times. Still, that's the joy (and trouble) of working with so many creative and talented people. We're not worried that the barrel will run dry - we're too busy reloading it.”



01

02

MEN IN BEARDS

Don't mess with developers from Eastern Europe – they're 'ard.

1 PETR VOCHOZKA – CEO, Illusion Softworks "All our effort is put into making the best games possible, and that's something I really enjoy doing"

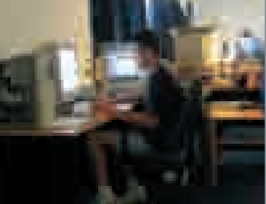
2 LUKAS KURE – Producer, Illusion Softworks "I'm incredibly proud to be working at Illusion alongside some of the most creative and talented people in our industry"

Of course, it's not just war that appears to be catching everyone's attention as of late – there are also the recent developments in the world of online gaming. Surprisingly, it's an area that the firm hasn't really explored up to now (with only *Vietcong* offering any kind of online support) but with consoles now moving into the online arena, there's little doubt that Illusion will step up to the challenge of using the technology available. "We would like to have online multiplayer support in some of our upcoming games for consoles," says Kure. "However, we will still develop games without multiplayer options as it doesn't always suit the genre or style of game. At present, we have no plans to create any purely online games like *Ultima* or *The Sims Online*. Personally, I still think there will be lots of people on consoles who will never try or play many games online. The most important thing for us with every new game is to decide the primary platform and the online content."

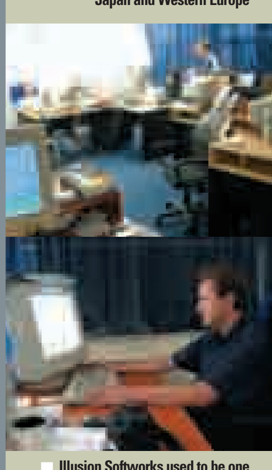
Despite having to fight something of an uphill battle to get itself recognised in the development industry, it's looking as though Illusion's dedication to its products and determination to get everything right is paying off. However, it might also have something to do with playing on the company's expertise – by focusing purely (for now) on genres with which Illusion has proven itself in the past, it can guarantee at least a modicum of success for the years to come. "3D gaming is where our strengths lie," says Vochozka adamantly, "and this is where we intend our focus to stay – it's highly unlikely that you'll ever see anything else from Illusion. We have the advantage that we create our own opportunities with the support of our publisher. However, if we were to present them with a nice cutesy children's game, for example, and they found it marketable, I do not see a reason why we shouldn't develop it."

A children's game? From the makers of *Vietcong*? Maybe one day, but what are Illusion's plans for now? "As a company, our mission is to develop action, strategy and simulation games," says Vochozka, "the majority of which are set in real-life situations such as historical or present-day settings, maybe with some small touches of mystery and sci-fi. It's possible that within a few years from now, we'll be working on something of this genre. We have currently eight teams busy working on eight different games (many of which are in at a very advanced stage, but not yet announced) and of these, I can say there will be one game that's more than a little surprising…" Could this mystery title be the 'nice cutesy children's game' mentioned earlier? Probably not, but we'll just have to wait and see.





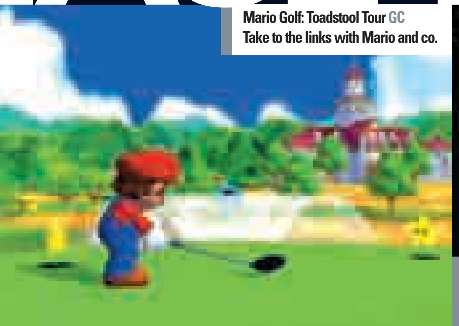
Forget the stereotypes – computer programmers *do* exist outside the US, Japan and Western Europe

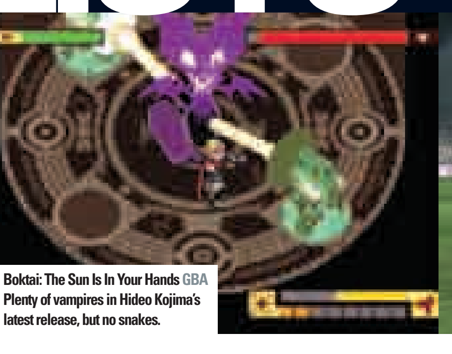


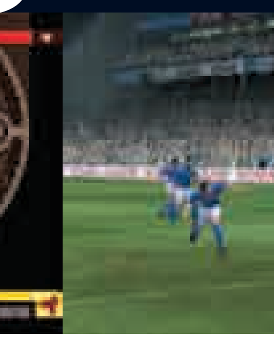
Illusion Softworks used to be one man and his machine, but now employs around 170 staff.

RELEASE LISTS


Manhunt PS2
Another potentially massive game from Rockstar.


Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour GC
Take to the links with Mario and co.


Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hands GBA
Plenty of vampires in Hideo Kojima's latest release, but no snakes.



games™ MOST PLAYED

POKÉMON RUBY/SAPPHIRE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

Seeing that the little blighters have just been released in the UK, it's the perfect excuse to once again pull out our SPs and participate in some serious duelling. Like *Yu-Gi-Oh* and *Advance Wars 2*, Nintendo's latest *Pokémon* adventure just gets better the more it's played. And it's definitely not one that's just for kids.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Activision

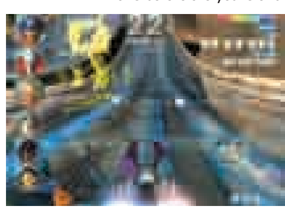
It's been a while but Bioware's RPG is finally here and is everything we were hoping for. An engaging storyline and some realistic and believable characters along with that *Star Wars* licence ensures that this should sell and sell. And just wait until your first big Lightsaber fight…



F-ZERO GX

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

We might have been blown away by the scorching arcade version, but the GameCube version is even better. Forget *Wipeout* and *XGRA* – if you want some blisteringly fast, gut-churning action, you need to pick yourself up a copy of this ASAP. Let's just hope Nintendo releases this before the year's end.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
12 September	The Italian Job: LA Heist	Eidos	
12 September	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
12 September	Robocop	Titus	
19 September	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	
19 September	Freedom Fighters	EA	Wanted
19 September	Ultimate SaGa	Atari	
26 September	Amplitude	SCEE	
26 September	Finding Nemo	THQ	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
26 September	Soul Calibur II	EA	Wanted
26 September	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	SCEE	
TBC	LMA Manager 2004	Codemasters	
TBC	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh: Duelists Of The Roses	Konami	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Alias	Acclaim	
10 October	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
10 October	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim	
17 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
24 October	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
24 October	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
31 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Falcone: Into The Maelstrom	Virgin	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Time Crisis 3	SCEE	
TBC	Worms 3D	SEGA	
TBC	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
14 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
21 November	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
26 November	Conan: The Dark Axe	TDK	
TBC	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Full Throttle II	LucasArts	
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Mafia	Take2	Wanted
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Capcom	
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
DECEMBER			
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted

GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	Conan: The Dark Axe	TDK	
12 September	The Italian Job: LA Heist	Eidos	
19 September	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
26 September	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
26 September	Soul Calibur II	Nintendo	Wanted
26 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
26 September	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
03 October	Wallace & Gromit In Project Zoo	BAM! Entertainment	
17 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
24 October	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
24 October	SSX3	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg	SEGA	Wanted
TBC	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars Rogue Squadron: Rebel Strike	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Worms 3D	SEGA	
NOVEMBER			
14 November	True Crime: Streets of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
14 November	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	
21 November	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	UbiSoft	Wanted
21 November	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
21 November	Metal Arms: Glitch In The System	Vivendi	
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
DECEMBER			
05 December	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	The Italian Job: LA Heist	Eidos	
12 September	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	Wanted
19 September	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	
19 September	Freedom Fighters	EA	Wanted
19 September	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
19 September	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Pro Evolution Soccer 3 PS2
Konami's continuing franchise gets ready for a new season.

Freedom Fighters Multi
Multiplayer team action from the makers of *Hitman 2*

Jak II: Renegade PS2
Jak and Daxter return for more platform shenanigans.

Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner PS2
After a long wait, it's finally here. Are all the added extras worth it, though?

19 September	XGRA	Acclaim	
26 September	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
26 September	Group S Challenge	Capcom	
26 September	Pro Cast Sports Fishing	Capcom	
26 September	Soul Calibur II	EA	Wanted
26 September	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
26 September	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	UbiSoft	Wanted
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	NBA 2K4	SEGA	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
17 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
24 October	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
24 October	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
24 October	Hunter The Reckoning: Redeemer	Vivendi	
24 October	SSX3	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Atari	
31 October	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	Wanted
31 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Otogi: Myth Of Demons	SEGA	
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom	
07 November	LOTR: Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
14 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
21 November	X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	
TBC	Worms 3D	SEGA	
DECEMBER			
TBC	Grabbed By The Ghoulies	Microsoft	
TBC	Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER			
19 September	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	
19 September	Freedom Fighters	EA	Wanted
19 September	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
19 September	Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	
19 September	Yager	THQ	
26 September	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos	Wanted
26 September	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
26 September	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
30 September	Crusaders	Wanadoo	
30 September	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Halo	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Railroad Tycoon III	Take 2	
OCTOBER			
01 October	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
01 October	Turok Evolution	Acclaim	
17 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
24 October	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	
31 October	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Breed	CDV	Wanted
TBC	Chicago 1930	Wanadoo	
TBC	Hidden And Dangerous 2	Take 2	
TBC	Space Colony	Take 2	
NOVEMBER			
01 November	Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne	Take 2	
21 November	Worms 3D	SEGA	
TBC	Call of Duty	Activision	



GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	Space Channel Five: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	Atari	
19 September	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Wanted
26 September	Finding Nemo	THQ	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
26 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
TBC	Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land	Nintendo	
TBC	Magical Quest Starring Mickey & Minnie 2	Capcom	
TBC	Sim City 2000	Zoo	
OCTOBER			
TBC	Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pitfall Harry	Activision	
TBC	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3	Nintendo	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
07 November	SSX3	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	
21 November	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
14 November	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Mario & Luigi	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Pinball Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Wanted

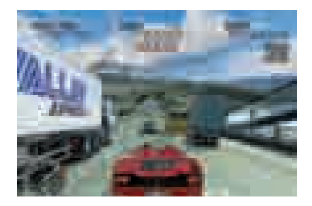
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We've got notes from our mums to excuse us anyway.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

OUT RUN 2

Format: Arcade
Publisher: SEGA

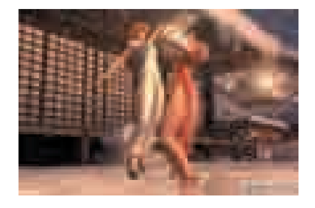
Forget the rather tepid-looking ports of *Space Harrier* and *Golden Axe* that are on their way to the PS2, this is the classic arcade revival we're salivating over. If Yu Suzuki and the rest of SEGA can do the same justice to the gameplay that they're doing with the visuals, we're going to be in retro heaven. Can it be better than the original? Possibly…



DEAD OR ALIVE ONLINE

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

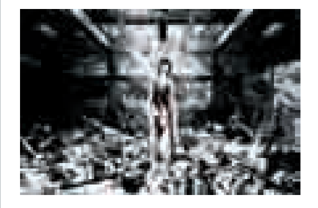
Whilst it can't match the depth or complexity of *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*, there's no doubt that the prospect of taking Kasumi and co online is very enticing. Sadly, it seems that this brawler will not be out until sometime next year (Tecmo is rumoured to be adding *Dead Or Alive 3* to the collection as well).



FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tecmo

We're huge fans of the original *Fatal Frame* (or *Project Zero* as it was known over here), so we can't wait for Tecmo's follow up. Taking control of two twins, *Crimson Butterfly* promises to be every bit as frightening as its fantastic predecessor. Don't have nightmares…





GAME PLAYERS – IT'S TIME TO PHONE HOME



It's happening whether you like it or not – more and more people are playing games on mobile phones. With the ever-increasing complexity of handsets and the corresponding quality of games, will this new industry take over from traditional games?

'No' is the definitive answer. Of course a phone can never replace a console or PC, but there's no reason why they cannot exist in parallel. Increasingly, publishers are looking for new ways to extend the life cycle of their titles (read: make more money from them) and mobile gaming offers them this opportunity. Think about how the music world has embraced the ringtone market for promotional purposes (and extra revenue) and you get an idea of what's possible.

Why couldn't a new game character first be introduced as a screensaver for your phone? Or your game music made into a ringtone? Or screenshots from the game converted into an animation to play on your phone? And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The real fun starts when you have full integration between mobile and console or PC games. Think about playing a bonus level of a game on your handset, which then provides links to your console via bluetooth, infra-red or USB and unlocks a new level, new track, new feature or whatever. We haven't even begun to look at the possibilities of location-based technology, bluetooth, 3G and so on.

The fun is just beginning with mobile games and they are set to make some serious revenues in the coming years. But their survival depends on their usefulness and how we develop applications for the devices. The message right now is don't be afraid of the future – embrace it now.

Enda Caret
Marketing Manager, iFONE

FROM THE FRONT

THE SPECS FOR THE PSP ARE HERE, AND MICROSOFT 'BORROWS' THE CUBE'S GRAPHICS CHIP DESIGNER…

VITAL STATISTICS

So what exactly can you expect to find inside one of these new-fangled PSPs?

PSP CPU CORE
MIPS R4000 32-bit Core
128-bit Bus
1 - 333MHz @ 1.2V
Main Memory: 8MB(eDRAM)
Bus Bandwidth: 2.6GB/sec
I-Cache, D-Cache
FPU, VFPU (Vector Unit) @ 2.6GFlops
3D-CG Extended Instructions

PSP Media Engine
MIPS R4000 32-bit Core
128-bit Bus
1 - 333MHz @ 1.2V
Sub Memory: 2MB(eDRAM) @ 2.6GB/sec
I-Cache, D-Cache
90nm CMOS

PSP Graphics Core 1
3D Curved Surfaces + 3D Polygons
Compressed Textures
Hardware Clipping, Morphing, Bone(8)
Hardware Tessellator
Bezier, B-Spline(NURBS) ex. 4x4, 16x16, 64x64 sub-division

PSP Graphics Core 2
'Rendering Engine' & 'Surface Engine'
256-bit Bus, 1-166 MHz @ 1.2V
VRAM: 2MB(eDRAM)
Bus Bandwidth: 5.3GB/sec
Pixel Fill Rate: 664 Mpixels/sec
max 33M polygon /sec(T&L)
24-bit Full Color: RGBA

PSP Sound Core: VME
Reconfigurable DSPs
128-bit Bus
166MHz @1.2V
5 Giga Operations/sec
CODEC
3D Sound, Multi-Channel(7.1)
Synthesizer, Effects Machine, etc.

AVC Decoder
AVC(H.264) Decoder
Main Profile
Baseline Profile
@Level1, Level2, Level3
2Hours(High Quality) – DVD movie
4Hours(Standard Quality) – CS Digital

I/O
USB 2.0
Memory Stick
Extension Port(reserved)
Stereo Headphone Out

Communication
Wireless LAN(i802.11)
IrDA
USB 2.0

THOSE PSP SPECIFICATIONS IN FULL

AT LONG LAST…

Since this year's E3, Sony has been feeding us information about its incoming PSP on an extremely limited 'need to know' basis. Finally coming to its senses, however, the full specifications for its first handheld have at last been revealed.

The PSP's architecture is going to be powered by two MIPS R4000 CPU cores; one is being designated as a CPU core, whilst the other is known as the 'Media Engine'. It's unsure at this time if both cores will be accessible by game applications, although we feel this will be extremely unlikely. PSP's Graphic Core 2 is very similar to the PS2's Graphics Synthesizer although it only runs at around half the clock speed (166 MHz, as opposed to the PlayStation2's 300 MHz). Indeed, the PSP now appears to be more of a cut-down PlayStation2, than simply an enhanced PlayStation, which means that the porting of original PlayStation titles to the new handheld may not necessarily be as easy as first thought.

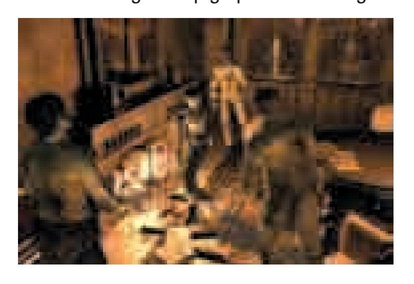
This could also explain why Sony has recently hired numerous emulation developers, although it could also point towards PS2 and PSX backwards compatibility for the Playstation3. It's quite possible that cut-down versions of early PS2 games such as *TimeSplitters* and *Ridge Racer 5* could even appear on the machine, which yet again shows how much Sony is prepared to distance itself from Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. "I don't think people will walk around with a PSP and treat it as roughly as you do with Game Boy," explained SCEE's president, Chris Deering, when the PSP was first announced, and with specifications like these, who could blame him?

ATI WILL DEVELOP NEW HARDWARE FOR XBOX 2

XBOX 2 COPIES GAMECUBE

Microsoft has announced that ATI Technologies Inc will supply all future graphics technologies for Xbox products. Although NVIDIA was expected to return to the Microsoft fold, a lawsuit over the price of Xbox chips and NVIDIA's production schedule has soured the partnership.

After this split, ATI, who designed the GameCube's graphics chip, became the next logical choice for Microsoft. "We selected ATI after reviewing the top graphics technologies



in development and determining that ATI's technical vision fits perfectly with the future direction of Xbox," said Robbie Bach, senior vice president of Microsoft's home and entertainment division.

K.Y. Ho, chairman and CEO of ATI Technologies, is looking forward to the challenges that developing for Xbox 2 will bring. "Microsoft shares our passion for cutting-edge technology," he said. "Our success working with Microsoft in the past gives us great confidence"

It will be interesting to see if ATI will continue to work with Nintendo after making this deal, or sever all ties in favour of Microsoft's new machine…

PIE IN THE SKY

WILL UK DEVELOPMENT EVER BECOME PROFITABLE?

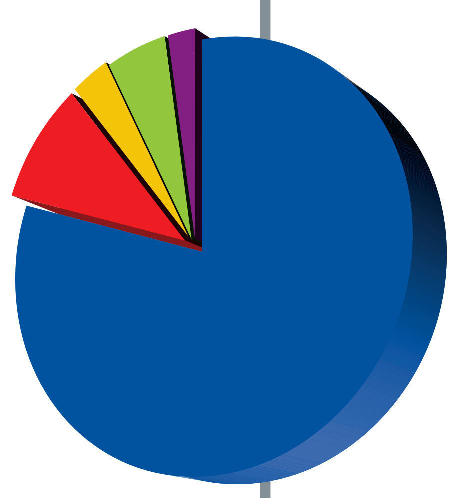
With the videogames industry now worth an estimated £4 billion every year, we thought it would be worth seeing how various developers in the UK are currently faring. Eidos is by far the largest games company based in the UK and has a market value of around £175 million pounds. SCi Entertainment is the next largest at around £20 million. Other companies of note include Argonaut Games (no doubt still smarting from the cancellations of *Orchid* and *Malice*), currently valued at £7 million, and Empire Interactive, which is worth £5 million.

Surprisingly, even with such high figures being bandied about, none of these softcos are that profitable. Eidos has continually posted losses over the last three years (although US sales of *Angel Of Darkness* have brought in £5 million). SCi has only managed to make a profit three times in the last five years, whilst Argonaut has fared worst of all, only managing to create a profit once in the same period.

It seems that Warthog could be one developer that's ready to break this worrying trend. Not only has it acquired several other developers (including Zed Two and Fever Pitch), it's also managed a 29 per cent increase in its turnover. Warthog has also been linked to several high-profile titles such as a new *Harry Potter* title for EA and a rumoured RPG based on the *Lord Of The Rings* franchise for Vivendi.

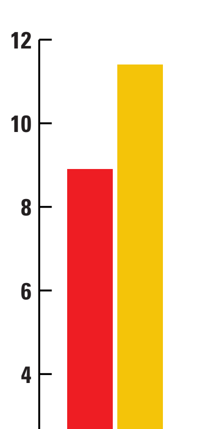
"Warthog has made the vitally important transition to become a leading European developer," said CEO Ashley Hall. "We have won several particularly high-calibre contracts over the last year that reaffirm our long-term strategy of working closely with premium publishers on global brands."

With British developers continually facing financial problems, our eyes are on the likes of Warthog to bring UK developers back into the limelight.



CURRENT MARKET VALUE

Eidos	£175 million
SCi	£20 million
Warthog	£11 million
Argonaut Games	£7 million
Empire Interactive	£5 million



TURNOVER FOR WARTHOG

2002 £8.9 million
2003 £11.4 million



MACE GRIFFIN

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Pokémon Ruby	Nintendo	GBA
2	Pokémon Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
3	EyeToy: Play	SCEE	Multi
4	FIFA 2003	Electronic Arts	PS2
5	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	PS2
6	Tomb Raider: AOD	Eidos	Multi
7	The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	PS2
8	007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	PS2
9	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
10	Enter The Matrix	Atari	Multi

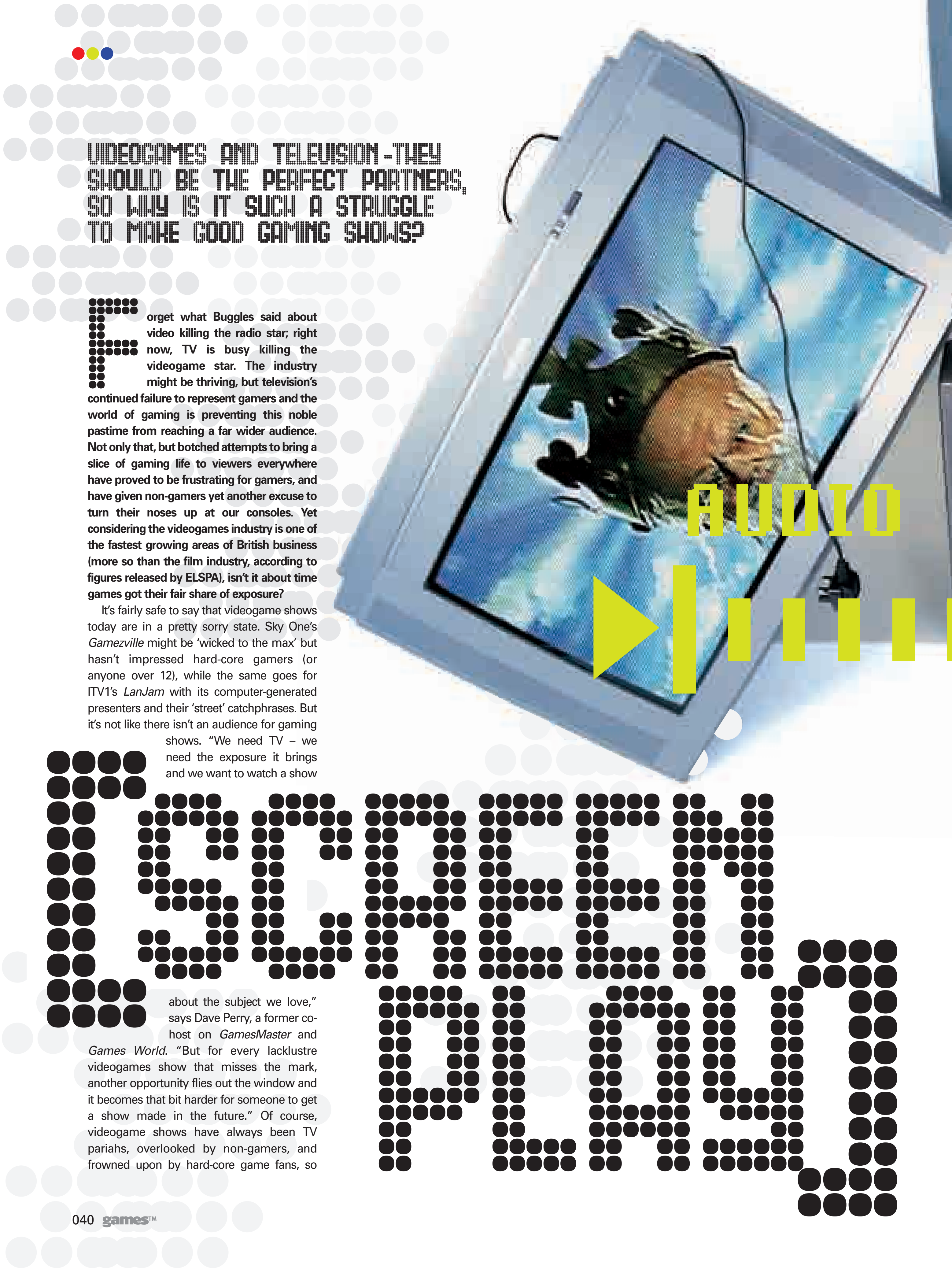
■ Nintendo's loveable Pokémon continue to hog the top spots, whilst Electronic Arts' platinum range dominates the rest of the chart. Sony's EyeToy is still selling extremely well and the disappointment that was *Enter The Matrix* is finally on its way out.



007: NIGHTFIRE

THE TWO TOWERS

EYETOY: PLAY



SCREEN PLAY

VIDEOGAMES AND TELEVISION – THEY SHOULD BE THE PERFECT PARTNERS, SO WHY IS IT SUCH A STRUGGLE TO MAKE GOOD GAMING SHOWS?

Forget what Buggles said about video killing the radio star; right now, TV is busy killing the videogame star. The industry might be thriving, but television's continued failure to represent gamers and the world of gaming is preventing this noble pastime from reaching a far wider audience. Not only that, but botched attempts to bring a slice of gaming life to viewers everywhere have proved to be frustrating for gamers, and have given non-gamers yet another excuse to turn their noses up at our consoles. Yet considering the videogames industry is one of the fastest growing areas of British business (more so than the film industry, according to figures released by ELSPA), isn't it about time games got their fair share of exposure?

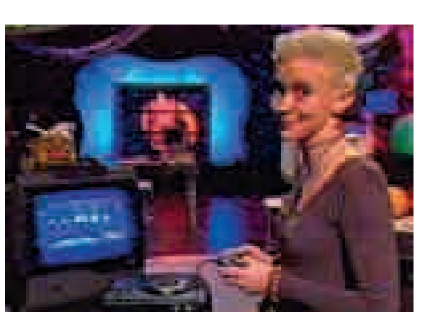
It's fairly safe to say that videogame shows today are in a pretty sorry state. Sky One's *Gamezville* might be 'wicked to the max' but hasn't impressed hard-core gamers (or anyone over 12), while the same goes for ITV1's *LanJam* with its computer-generated presenters and their 'street' catchphrases. But it's not like there isn't an audience for gaming shows. "We need TV – we need the exposure it brings and we want to watch a show about the subject we love," says Dave Perry, a former co-host on *GamesMaster* and *Games World*. "But for every lacklustre videogames show that misses the mark, another opportunity flies out the window and it becomes that bit harder for someone to get a show made in the future." Of course, videogame shows have always been TV pariahs, overlooked by non-gamers, and frowned upon by hard-core game fans, so

EFFECTS

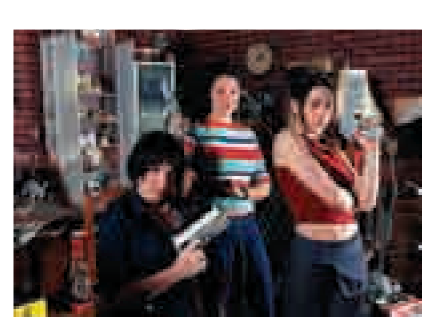
what have they done wrong? One of the main problems seems to be that, unlike gamers, videogame shows haven't grown up. The first games shows appeared in the early Nineties in the heyday of the SNES and the Mega Drive, and many gamers who picked up a pad in their formative years have continued to play games as they've got older. Violet Berlin, former presenter of *Bad Influence* and now *Game-Pad* (which she co-produces with Gareth 'Gaz Top' Jones), thinks this is the main reason games don't get wider coverage. "Videogames aren't on TV because they're not yet mass market," she says. "Sure, they sell a lot, but only to a niche – men aged 16-34. Demographically speaking, movies and music have a far wider reach." So not only do games have a limited appeal, but the majority of shows that are made aren't appealing to the right age group.

Jack Templeton, editor of the *GamesMaster* fansite gamesmastertv.co.uk, agrees that games show producers have missed the mark. "The current flock of videogames TV shows go wrong on the account that 'yoofs' sound just as tragic and stupid saying 'wicked' and 'wazzock' as the presenters do," he says. "The only show out there that shows any signs of decency is *Game-Pad*, but it still doesn't have the spark that the Nineties shows had." The tea-time slots given to most gaming shows clearly demonstrate the age-group the shows' makers are after, but then, according to Templeton, the youth-oriented programming goes too far. "In the case of *LanJam* and *Gamezville* they ask kids to review the games – this is always a no-go area," he says. "I'm not saying kids should be deprived of their dreams of appearing on TV, merely that they should be invited on the basis that they add something to the show and not just reply to questions with 'yeah' and 'the graphics are good'." Getting

"ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS SEEMS TO BE THAT, UNLIKE GAMERS, VIDEOGAME SHOWS HAVEN'T GROWN UP"



From *Bad Influence* to *Game-Pad*, Violet Berlin is one of the longest-serving games TV presenters on British television.



They looked a darn sight better than most videogames journalists, but the *Bits* crew didn't stick around for long.

GAMESTARS IN THEIR EYES

A recent attempt at getting games on television was *GameStars* – a programme intended to "show the country just how far the games industry has come", according to Simon Byron, who headed up the PR for the show. "We worked very closely with Granada to ensure *GameStars* was a programme that delivered entertainment around videogames in accordance with the ITC guidelines," he says, "and I believe we made great strides. We as an industry weren't on the TV radar before *GameStars*; we are now." But while the show might have been a success for industry types, it failed to win over gamers with its strange mix of awards and the search to find 'Britain's best gamer'. "What was an awards show for the games industry doing on terrestrial TV, when there aren't any successful games shows to back it up?" argues Dave Perry. "Let's bring the hobby to TV audiences via successful entertainment shows before we start handing out prizes for something that's still an underground pastime as far as the rest of the country is concerned."

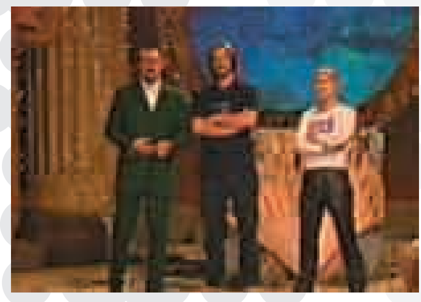
[SCREEN PLAY]

children to review games might seem like a right-on 'made by kids for kids' idea, but probably has more to do with the fact that, for older gamers at least, the reviews on TV gaming shows are largely irrelevant. "In terms of news and reviews, 'proper' gamers aren't interested because they don't believe they will see anything that they don't already know," says Jonny Ffinch, producer of *GamesMaster* from series four onwards. "They're getting their news from the Internet."

Not only are TV shows less up to date than gaming websites, but time is at a premium and it can be hard to accommodate everyone's gaming tastes. "When *Game-Pad 3* was first broadcast, we showed a three-minute review of the then Japanese import Dreamcast game *Ikaruga*, which I thought was pretty brave," recalls Violet Berlin. "Three minutes is a long time in TV, and *Ikaruga* is pretty hard-core. Believe it or not though, someone wrote in to complain that the review was too short." Clearly, hard-core gamers do want coverage that appeals to them, but most shows don't have the time to go in-depth. The nature of television, with its time-consuming production schedules and the endless repeats, seems to be a further hindrance when it comes to making a games show. Gareth Jones, director and co-producer of *Game-Pad*, reckons it's a constant struggle to work within the confines of a TV schedule. "As *Game-Pad* gets repeated a lot, we have to be very careful with the information we give out on the show," he says. "It might be



Andy Crane may have been enthusiastic on *Bad Influence*, but an authority on gaming? We didn't think so either…



The presenting dream team? Dominik Diamond, Kirk Ewing and Dave 'enough with the bandana already' Perry.

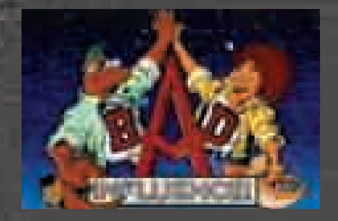
accurate at the time of going to press, but not in a month's time. Because of the constraints of repeats, *Game-Pad* has become more feature-led – we focus on the culture of games and the people who play them, and interviews with people behind the scenes. We feel this more mature approach is more realistic than just trying to chase the exclusive."

"GAMES CAN BE GRIPPING FOR THE PERSON INTERACTING WITH THEM, BUT THEY'RE NOT SPECTATOR MATERIAL"

Unfortunately, while this approach to videogames TV might make sense and bring things more into line with shows covering other forms of entertainment such as film or music, it tends to be restricted to digital channels with a limited audience. Head for the channels that most people watch and what you'll see is usually the same – kids playing games, all in the name of entertainment. However, the 'viewer challenges' concept is one that is currently letting the side down in a big way; though it gives young gamers a chance to show off their prowess, the nature of gaming means that watching someone play doesn't always make good TV. "Games are interactive, and while they can be deeply gripping for the person interacting with them, they're not ideal spectator material," says Jonny Ffinch. "Obviously, sports like football are interactive too, but they're more physically visceral endeavours and the people playing the games are the ones you watch." Clearly, the lack of appeal in watching some kid struggling to master *R-Type*

TV TIMES

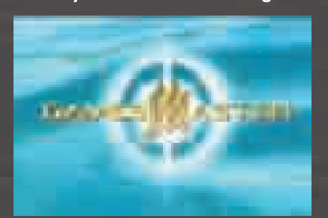
Some television shows have been very influential on how videogames are portrayed by the viewing public – though not always in a good way. See how many of these you remember watching over the years…



BAD INFLUENCE

First Broadcast: 1992

One of the first shows that portrayed games as more than just a geeky hobby, *Bad Influence* was presented by Andy Crane and Violet Berlin, as well as several other minor characters (including tips guru Nam Rood). The show featured reviews and features and ran for four seasons. It also boasted the revolutionary 'Databurst' – record it, play it back, get tips. Ace.



GAMESMASTER

First Broadcast: 1992

Channel 4's foil to *Bad Influence*, running in a slightly later early-evening slot. Although the first series had a clean-cut image and a perky Dominik Diamond, following seasons saw it take a more tongue-in-cheek attitude, which endeared it to more hard-core gamers. With eight seasons under its belt, *GamesMaster* is the longest-running games TV show to date.



GAMES WORLD

First Broadcast: 1993

Another show from the creators of *GamesMaster*, taking all the concepts from the 30-minute show and spreading them throughout an entire week. Challenge elements were shown on three days, while reviews, cheats and live coverage featured in the other two shows. However, the format changed over the show's four seasons until only the challenge format remained.



THE COMPUTER CHANNEL

First Broadcast: 1996

The first channel dedicated to computers and technology. Games coverage was limited to a half-hour show presented initially by Donna Air and ex-*Games World* co-host Alex Verrey. The channel was re-branded as [.tv] in 1998 and reduced to broadcasting just 12 hours a day, before being closed late in 2001.

BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST

Final is something that presents a great problem when producing a videogames show with challenge elements. Sadly, shows like *LanJam* and *Gamezville* prove it's a problem for which no-one has an answer yet.

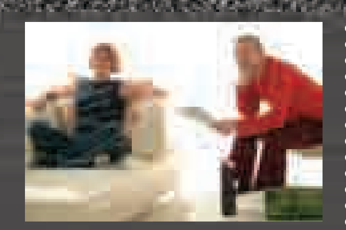
With the 'news and reviews' format facing an uphill struggle (having been superceded by the Internet) and the thought of audience participation making most gamers reach for their remotes, it's clear that a radical shake up could be what the games show genre needs, starting with the people behind the scenes. "The [right] attitude has been there for years in the industry's magazines, yet the TV companies just don't see it," reckons Dave Perry. "That isn't to say that TV shows should be put together solely by magazine 'experts', because whether they like it or not, a majority of them are quite geeky and wouldn't come across well in front of a camera. However, consulting them and taking their products as a blueprint for a show would certainly be a good start." Persuading the people that matter (the producers and commissioners) to change, however, could prove tricky as opinions have changed little over the years. "For a long time videogames used to look like crap," says Steve Keen, producer of shows such as *Bad Influence*, *Cybernet* and *Thumb Bandits*. "It's only recently that they look any way near good enough to put on TV for any length of time. For the most part though, videogames are still perceived as a male domain and a commissioning editor's first duty is to commission programmes that appeal equally to



BITS

First Broadcast: 1998

After the more child-friendly approach of shows like *Bad Influence*, *Bits* was decidedly more adult. A late-night show, its three female presenters all knew their stuff in varying degrees and helped cater for the stereotypical male gamer. The show's content managed to provide enough interesting features to keep the show alive for five seasons.



GAME-PAD

First Broadcast: 2000

Game-Pad tends to focus on features and other elements rather than audience participation, and is aimed at a specific gaming audience despite appealing to everyone – emphasised by the fact that it runs on Bravo, a digital channel targeted at males aged 16-34. Currently on its third series, the show has an audience of over three million viewers.



THUMB BANDITS

First Broadcast: 2001

Hosted by Aleks Krotoski (of *Bits* fame) and Iain Lee. Like *Bits* it was intended as a more adult answer to gaming television with plenty of humour and honesty in its reviews. But it received mixed responses from gamers thanks to alleged inaccuracies in its reporting, a lack of in-game footage and the use of reporters with a lack of knowledge concerning the subject matter.

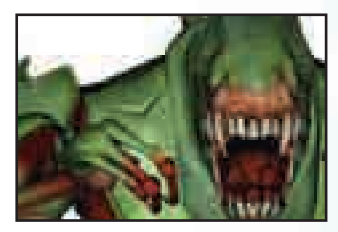


GAME NETWORK

First Broadcast: 2002

Despite not being the first computer-related channel around, Game Network was (and still is) the only one totally dedicated to the subject of videogames. However, with much of the programme content being dedicated in the past to premium-rate phone competitions and late-night 'adult' chat, a lot of gamers have been left sorely disappointed.

[SCREEN PLAY]



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Of course, not all videogame shows are shows about games – some, like the BBC's upcoming *Fightbox*, are more shows set within the games themselves. Like the ill-fated *Cyberzone* (the Virtual Reality disaster of a show presented by Craig Charles in the early Nineties), the show features 3D virtual characters – but rather than putting on a Virtual Reality headset and looking like a fool, contestants design their own warriors on their PCs at home before appearing on TV, where their warriors are recreated in 3D and slug it out in a virtual arena. Dave Anderson, studio head at Gamezlab (the software company behind the *Fightbox* technology), thinks that the viewer participation is what sets the show apart from other gaming programmes. "There have only really been magazine-based shows which review games on TV, or shows that mimic gaming," he says. "These shows don't really allow the gamer their moment of glory on a real-time TV show, which is what *Fightbox* is all about." As it stands, the show looks like *Robot Wars* for the PC generation – though whether it will turn out to be any good is another thing entirely. Viewers can decide for themselves when *Fightbox* airs towards the end of October.

boys and girls."

Sadly, it's not just the top brass at the production companies and TV stations who are getting in the way of quality gaming programming either – it's the games companies themselves. Exposure for new games is all-important, but where this exposure is achieved is even more vital. "As far as most videogame PR people are concerned, television comes very low down on their wish list of coverage," says Violet Berlin. "They focus on getting good magazine review scores, and at least 50 per cent of them don't return our staff's calls and emails. The agencies can be a bit better, but then they'll admit to us that it's more important for them to get coverage on a magazine with a readership of 20,000 to please the game's publisher than it is to go out on a show like *Game-Pad* with audiences in the millions."

This preference for print media over TV may have something to do with the rather poor track record of a lot of games programmes compared to the pedigree of long-running magazines. However, it also has a lot to do with the burgeoning success of the games industry. As publishers become aware that a well-known franchise or a much-hyped game is a money-spinner, they're less likely to let it be used on a videogames show where they won't have control over its use. What's more, access to the people responsible for the game is now practically non-existent, except in a strictly controlled form. "I remember doing something on *Kick Off* years ago," says Steve Keen, "and trying to track down someone from Anco to talk about the game. I was given the phone number of a guy, called the number and it was Dino Dini – the programmer himself. That would never ever happen now. Programmers are only let out under the strictest PR supervision. Publishers have got wise to the fact that if a game sucks, they could still make some money from it if no one knows about it; if they don't promote it at all, don't give any interviews and try and bury it, it won't be a total loss."

"SONY SAID IF IT FELT A STRONG NEED TO BE ON TV, IT WOULD GO OUT AND MAKE ITS OWN SHOWS"

The growth of the games industry has also meant that, in some cases, games manufacturers are now bigger than the TV companies, as Jonny Ffinch found out. "I was at a meeting with a commissioner from Channel 4 and the head marketing guy at Sony just before PS2 came out," he says. "Channel 4 were coming across very superior, along the lines of 'If you're lucky, we might devote some airtime to your geeky little product but we're going to need you to do this and that.' The Sony guy listened patiently and then explained that while they'd be happy to



"GAMERS ARE A CYNICAL BUNCH AND CAN SEE THROUGH SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE SUBJECT"

COLOUR BALANCE

help if they could, Sony really didn't need Channel 4 – the PlayStation brand was much bigger than Channel 4 and if they felt a strong need to be on TV they'd simply go out and make their own shows." Sadly, the condescending attitudes of producers and the reluctance of games companies to hand over their assets for use on TV means that gaming TV looks to be going nowhere fast. Plenty of people seem to know what makes a games show successful, but it's putting these ideas into practice that will no doubt prove problematic.

Jonny Ffinch is sure of the key things a games shows needs – "Real knowledge of the subject, a genuine approach, it must be up to date, and a sense of humour – nearly every good show has humour in it" – while Steve Keen thinks that "even people who aren't into videogames should be able to watch it and be entertained." In addition, says Jack Templeton, you also need a credible frontman. "The core audience of gamers are generally quite a cynical bunch and can see through anyone who doesn't understand the first thing about the subject," he explains. "It's no good getting any young female presenter who looks pretty as this just reinforces the notion that gamers watch the show with the controller in their left hand and something else in the right."

Remember, you were meant to be watching to find out about games, not to watch young ladies messing about…



Bob Mills and Tim Boon were the avuncular hosts of Sky One's *Games World*… beforeit went all junglist, that is.

But after so many variations have tried and failed – the risqué girliness of *Bits*, the more 'adult' *Thumb Bandits* or the farce that is the 24-hour Game Network channel – should gamers just accept that a well-respected games show is a thing of the past? Ffinch certainly admits that the popularity of *GamesMaster* today is "no doubt due to the rose-tinted goggles of nostalgia", and it's true that the show coincided with a hugely creative and fondly remembered period in gaming history. But whether the quality of *GamesMaster* is real or imagined, Jack Templeton thinks that current games shows have gone too far into the grip of the moneymen. "It certainly seems the case today that creativity has been shoved aside to be replaced with a general sense of getting 'down' with the fanboys," he says.

And that's probably the greatest problem of them all right now – because the current wave of shows on mainstream television focus on trying to be streetwise and coming up with catchy slogans that sound as ignorant as the presenters usually are, any hope of showing off games in a good light is lost. Only the smaller digital channels manage to offer a ray of hope (thanks to shows like *Game-Pad* and, to a lesser extent, *SFG* on the Sci-Fi Channel) but even so, this only supplies a minority with something even close to what most gamers want. With so many issues to sort out regarding programme format and target audience (be it broad and patronising for everyone, or anal and alienating for just gamers), it's unlikely that a definitive games TV show will appear any time soon. Until it does though, games will never truly be considered as mass-market as films or music. Will this change? Stay tuned to find out…



I command you – wise from your gwave! **Altered Beast Arcade [SEGA] 1988**


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ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

ITS PREDECESSOR SHIFTED GAMECUBES, BUT WILL REBEL STRIKE DO THE SAME THIS CHRISTMAS?

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Factor 5
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

Focusing on many of the action sequences from George Lucas' *Star Wars* movie series, Factor 5 once again looks set to deliver the ultimate shoot-'em-up experience.

The release of the GameCube was a little different from most Nintendo hardware launches. Mario was nowhere to be seen, and not one of the other launch titles developed by Nintendo itself brought anything particularly new or exciting to the market. Instead, it was SEGA's *Monkey Ball* that led the way – proving that the technology was more than capable of competing in a cut-throat market, and that innovation in gaming was alive and well.

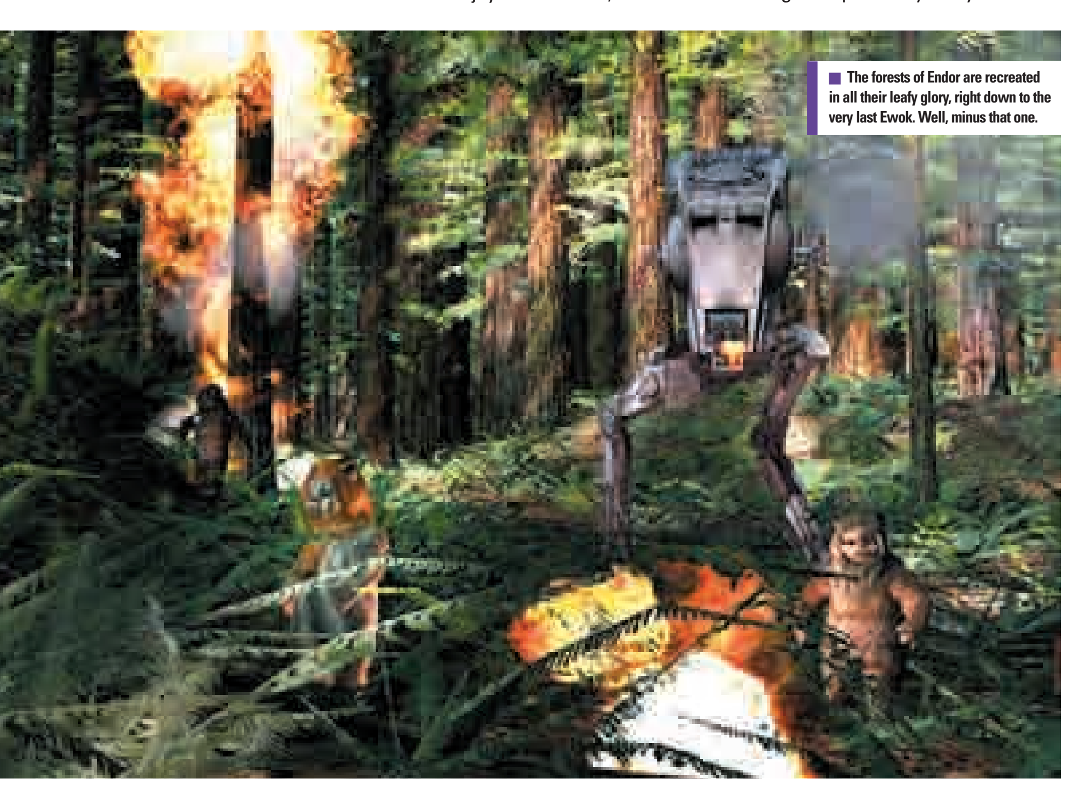
Of course, monkeys in balls aren't exactly the sort of thing that the majority of gamers look for from a new console, and without a mass-market killer-app Nintendo's robust little machine could easily have flopped from day one. Thankfully, Factor 5's *Rogue Leader* demonstrated a superb use both of the technology on offer and the *Star Wars* licence, and in doing so appealed to hard-core and casual gamers.

Despite its impressive visuals and broad appeal, though, *Rogue Leader* wasn't the perfect piece of software that some had made it out to be. Enjoyable as it was, the core gameplay consisted of little more than shooting down targets, while twitchy controls resulted in the vessels feeling more like plastic toys than weighty metal spaceships. To top it off, the otherwise polished graphics engine had a tendency to lose its silky 60 frames-per-second screen update whenever there was an explosion. The reasons for these glitches, however, were a strict completion deadline and the fact that much of the program code was built on unfinished workstations, rather than due to hardware limitations.

Well, it's been almost two years since *Rogue Leader* launched in America, and Factor 5 has been hard at work on the next instalment in its popular series – *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike* – ever since. Work started just one month after *Rogue Leader* was completed, as Factor 5's CEO, Julian Eggebrecht, reveals. "We immediately started on prototypes of the forest sequences and Hoth, both of them huge technical undertakings," he says. And it's not difficult to see where all the hard work has gone – practically every battle is on a larger scale than before, and each of the landscapes is positively bursting at the seams with eye-popping texture and detail. Light sourcing and shadow-casting effects are also more impressive than before, and this is one area that Eggebrecht is particularly proud of. "The new atmospheric lighting engine simulates the distribution of light in a more or less physically correct way in real time," he points out.

Unfortunately, the fact that so many polygons, lighting effects and textures are being processed simultaneously has brought about memory issues that Factor 5 has had to address. "We maxed out the memory restrictions of the GameCube with *Rogue Leader* so it was essential to get a very aggressive streaming engine going for *Rebel Strike* to circumnavigate the small 24MB memory footprint," says Eggebrecht. "We ended up streaming everything constantly, so even as you approach buildings and landscape details, the textures are being fetched from the disc." From what we've seen so far it would appear that this works well, though there are slight irregularities in the frame rate in the preview code, perhaps due to the disc constantly being accessed for texture retrieval. Hopefully, this slight gripe will be rectified before release, though even in its current state *Rebel Strike* runs far more consistently than *Rogue Leader*.

Another aspect of the game that's been expanded significantly is the gameplay. It ▷

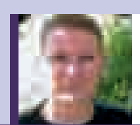


The forests of Endor are recreated in all their leafy glory, right down to the very last Ewok. Well, minus that one.

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

Incredibly, *Rebel Strike* will include the full *Rogue Leader* as a two-player co-op game. Thanks to the new graphics engine, no detail will be lost from the game when running in split-screen. Other multiplayer games are also set to be featured across a range of *Star Wars* locations, the most promising being Speederbike racing through the forests of Endor. Sadly, Factor 5 has ruled out console link via LAN, saying: "We did consider it, but discarded it in the early stages of the design. If the *Rogue Squadron* series goes online it will be a massive undertaking, not something we could do justice to as a subset of *Rebel Strike*."

ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE
GAMECUBE



DEVELOPER PROFILE
■ Factor 5 CEO Julian Eggebrecht has been involved in the games industry since 1989 when he and some friends decided that their game ideas were good enough to be released. From his parents' home in Germany, Eggebrecht struck a publishing deal with LucasArts (then Lucasfilm Games).

HISTORY
■ **STAR WARS ROGUE LEADER: RS II** 2002 [GC]
■ **STAR WARS: EPISODE I BATTLE FOR NABOO** 2000 [N64]
■ **TURRICAN** 1990 [Amiga]

■ Gorgeous as *Rogue Leader* was, Factor 5 has managed to make *Rebel Strike* even more impressive to look at.

"WITH REBEL STRIKE, LUCASARTS EXPANDS THE AWARD-WINNING FLIGHT ACTION FRANCHISE WITH MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT AND CHARACTER-BASED COMBAT"
MARCELLA CHURCHILL, LUCASARTS

■ Many popular sections have been extracted from the *Star Wars* movies, including Luke's training on Dagobah.

■ As well as the flying sections, you get to gad about on a Taun-Taun.

ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE CONT.



The range of locations on offer is as diverse as any *Star Wars* fan could wish for.

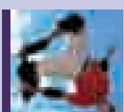
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SAME AS BEFORE, ONLY MUCH, MUCH MORE

ROGUE LEADER x POLYGONS + VARIATION = REBEL STRIKE

"EACH OF THE LANDSCAPES IS POSITIVELY BURSTING AT THE SEAMS WITH EYE-POPPING TEXTURE AND DETAIL"

Factor 5's new graphics engine allows for far more polygons to be processed.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Recently, Activision has become well known for publishing the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series, though the company's heritage goes back a lot further. Older gamers will no doubt remember the name Activision from the boxes of over a hundred C64 games published in the Eighties.

HISTORY

- **SPIDER-MAN** 2002 [Multi]
- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER** 2000 [Multi]
- **PITFALL** 1983 [C64]

appears that Factor 5 has been inspired by the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* as a range of vehicles are now accessible in many of the levels, bringing a little more variation and freedom to each segment of the game. Progression is still broken up into missions, as before, but through constant changes in pace and gameplay structure, the developer has been able to induce a far more exciting experience.

The perfect example of this new mission structure can be seen on the ice planet of Hoth, which is making a welcome return. Rather than simply flying around as before, the mission begins with the entire Snowspeeder crash landing sequence from *The Empire Strikes Back*, after which Luke, armed only with his Blaster, must run around on foot destroying Stormtroopers. From there on in, things become more interesting as the mission expands to include the destroying of AT-ATs with thermal detonators, riding around on a Taun-Taun, manning a laser-cannon, then taking to the skies once again in an X-Wing. Each segment is momentarily broken up with cleverly edited clips from the movies, demonstrating Factor 5's artistic and technical abilities in one jaw-dropping extravaganza. The final section is particularly impressive, with an epic battle that features no less than 50 incredibly authentic enemy ships on screen at once.

Sadly, some elements of this expanded gameplay are a little flawed in the preview version. The flying sections control in much the same way that they did before, with the ships still feeling a bit on the light side (no pun intended), but the real problems arise when it comes to controlling the characters on foot. As surprising as it may seem after so many years of creating games in three dimensions, these sections tend to have real problems with the camera. Much of the time it's either too close or too far away from the action, making it difficult to see exactly what's going on.

To make matters worse, the gameplay is generally too simplistic, as there's really little more to do than run around blasting at enemies with virtually no control over accuracy. Eggebrecht admits that this has been the most difficult part of the game to get right, saying: "It's tough to find a balance between frantic action and slipping into the deliberate tempo of a first-person shooter – something we want to avoid." However, he insists that the team will continue to make adjustments – "We will tweak these levels until the last minute," he says. Let's just hope that's long enough to get the game right.

Regardless of whether these imperfections are rectified before launch, *Rebel Strike* is still shaping up to be one of the better *Star Wars* videogames around. After such atrocities as *Star Wars: Starfighter* and *Star Wars: Obi-Wan*, it's difficult not to be cautious whenever a new *Star Wars* game comes along, but if the preview code is anything to go by you can rest assured that *Rebel Strike* will be well worth a purchase.

The only downside for *Star Wars* fans is that this Christmas they're going to have to buy a GameCube for *Rebel Strike* and an Xbox for *Knights Of The Old Republic*…

"REBEL STRIKE IS STILL SHAPING UP TO BE ONE OF THE BETTER STAR WARS VIDEOGAMES AROUND"

GRAND THEFT ALMOST

Although *Rogue Leader* received nothing but praise when it was released, it didn't take long for the backlash to begin. No-one could dispute that the graphics engine was stunning for a launch title, but flashy visuals couldn't hide the somewhat shallow (and at times frustratingly difficult) gameplay. Factor 5 obviously took these criticisms on board, as *Rebel Strike* has been adjusted to include more gameplay variation and balance. Aside from the usual flying aspect, the game will also feature ground-based vehicles, including AT-STs and Speederbikes, to help spice things up. Unfortunately, these will not be accessible at any time (as in *Grand Theft Auto*) but will be introduced via FMV cut-scenes at specific points during the levels.



Speederbike racing through the forests of Endor should be great fun for two players.

Various two-player games will be on offer, including *Rogue Leader* in its entirety.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND



The core skating gameplay is still here in all its addictive glory, but the settings are quite different.

"HOPEFULLY IT'LL GET MORE PEOPLE INSPIRED TO START SKATING, WHICH GIVES OUR INDUSTRY MORE LEGITIMACY"

TONY HAWK, PROFESSIONAL SKATER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

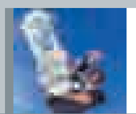
GOING UNDERGROUND

THPS4 + GTA 3 x CREATE YOUR OWN = THUG

It's not all work, work, work – you get to hang wit' yo virtual buddies as well.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

PS2/MULTIFORMAT



CONSULTANT PROFILE

■ Born 1968 in San Diego, legendary skater Tony Hawk turned pro at the age of 14 and won countless competitions during an illustrious career. Since retiring from the sport, numerous endorsements and an appearance in *The Simpsons*' 300th episode have cemented his place on the celebrity A-list.

HISTORY

■ **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4** 2002 [Multi]
■ **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3** 2001 [Multi]
■ **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER** 1999 [Multi]

TONY HAWK RETURNS WITH SOME MAJOR NEW TRICKS UP HIS SLEEVE

PS2 **When we reviewed the fantastic fourth instalment of the *Pro Skater* series in issue 1, we were left wondering what on earth Neversoft could come up with to take the franchise any further.** After each of Tony's previous outings successfully brought enough new ideas to the table to prove themselves as worthy sequels, surely last year's display of elephant skitching finally saw the concept stretched as far as it would go. But determined not to close the book on the immensely lucrative series just yet, how would those innovative developers deliver another slice of kick-flipping action without disappointing the fans?

Fully aware that simply slapping a few new manoeuvres, locations and missions onto the end of *Pro Skater 4* wouldn't cut it, the series has been subjected to a complete conceptual overhaul. Whilst the winning gameplay formula remains firmly at the heart of *Tony Hawk's Underground*, an entirely fresh approach looks set to take the genre to ambitious new heights. Rather than starting out as a recognisable figure from the skating world, *THUG* invites you to take the role of your virtual self and begin a thoroughly immersing journey from humble beginnings to the top of the pro skating pile.

Taking inspiration from the rags to riches stories of real-life professionals, you'll step into the tattered sneakers of a talented youngster tick-tack-toeing their way around a typical New Jersey neighbourhood. While free-roaming your way around the mean streets you'll encounter a variety of characters dishing out missions to put your boarding skills to the test. Basically your initial goal will be to strut your stuff around the 'hood in the hope of being 'discovered' by the right people and whisked off to the West Coast pro scene.

There are set to be nine expansive locations to fully explore as your career progresses, each comprising a living virtual city complete with day and night cycles. In a move to emulate the kind of wholesome gaming experience found in *GTA3*, your character will be able to take full advantage of these massive environments by stepping off the skateboard for the first time and exploring on foot. One of the most hotly anticipated features of *THUG*, this freedom looks set to add a completely new dimension to proceedings whilst granting players unrestricted access to those nooks and crannies they wouldn't be able to reach on a board.

Expect to see your character clambering up to the rooftops and hanging from telegraph wires in true action adventure style, all in the name of lining up that ultimate string of combos. The skating action is broken up even further by putting players behind the wheel of a car in a number of missions, and rumours are rife about the variety of driveable vehicles being included in the final game.

The whole idea seems to bear more than a passing resemblance to the winning concept behind Rockstar's aforementioned crime sim, padding out the mission-based skating tasks with a freely navigable city and engaging storyline to immerse us in much more than a linear collection of objectives. And with all-new difficulty settings ensuring experienced players and intrigued newcomers receive an equally warm welcome, we're expecting *THUG* to take the gaming world's premier skating sim to a new level.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
RELEASE: 7 November '03
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-8 Online

■ The *Tony Hawk* series takes freedom to another level with its in-depth and innovative fifth outing. How can it get better than this?

STAR OF THE SHOW

For the ultimate personalised gaming experience, *THUG* not only lets you map your digital mugshot onto your character via Neversoft's automated online system, but also allows you to create trademark tricks. By blending elements of existing manoeuvres with a few rotations and some positional tweaking, the ultimate high-scoring piece of trickery can be designed and configured to the controller ready for use. This feature also enables you to trim your favourite preset moves to merge more seamlessly during combos. With your own face on a character performing your unique set of tricks for all the online community to see, you really can become a boarding legend.

"TAKE YOUR VIRTUAL SELF FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO THE TOP OF THE PRO SKATING PILE"



■ With new moves and the chance to create your own trademark tricks, *THUG* is a comprehensive skate sim.

■ You now have the freedom to run around as well as skate.

KIRBY'S AIR RIDE



It's hardly *F-Zero*, but the tracks are well designed and have plenty of variety to keep you interested.

ONE-BUTTON KIRBY HOPES THAT SIMPLE CAN ALSO BE EFFECTIVE

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: HAL Laboratory
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (Japan: Out now)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

Nintendo's fat, pink furball hops on a star and competes against three other riders in this simple but cute racer.

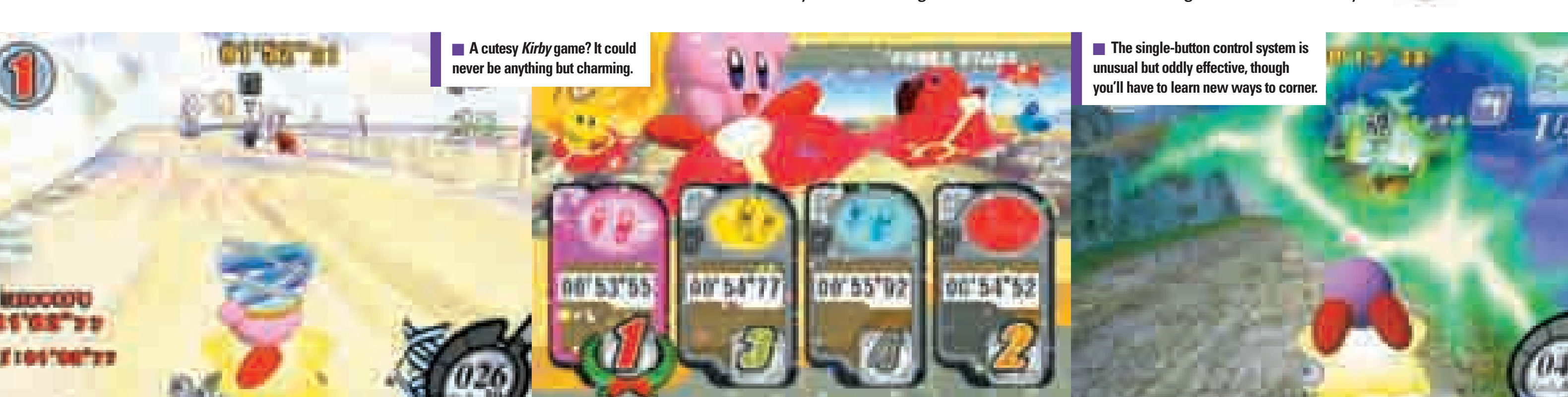
The idea of popular game characters taking to the racetrack is nothing new, as we've seen Mario, Crash Bandicoot and Sonic hit the road in their own racing games in the past. However, where *Kirby Air Ride* takes a left turn instead of following the pack is that everything – and we mean everything - is controlled by one button.

Given that most modern racing games are multi-button behemoths, this comes as something of a surprise – however, once you start taking Kirby around the twisty tracks, this peculiar idea starts to make sense. Essentially, there's no accelerator as Kirby zips around on his own, meaning you have to use the A-button to brake. The same button also boosts Kirby when released depending on how long you hold it down, which means you need to develop a unique technique for turning corners. It's also this button that sucks up any nearby power-ups, ranging from Tornados to Electricity Blasts. And once you've got a power-up? Press the A-button to use it. It's a refreshingly simple system that makes the game easy to pick up and play without the need to wade through instructions or use trial and error to find out what the buttons do.

It's not just the single-button innovation that sticks out either, because *Air Ride* drips with colour and charm, making the aesthetics equally notable. All the riders look typically vibrant and bubbly, and the music is lively without being intrusive. The courses are also impressive and well-designed, with multiple obstacles and short cuts to ensure they stay interesting – however, things are kept as simple and fun as possible, with Kirby bouncing back into play rather than falling off the track should a turn go wrong. Unfortunately, it makes this a little too easy to play, as it's just as easy to bounce from wall to wall to the finish line as it is to take corners properly.

From what we've played, our main concern is that the 'pick up and play' ethos has been taken too far, sacrificing depth and control for accessibility. A plethora of unlockable extras are included, but the option to accelerate by ourselves would have been just as welcome. Will European gamers take to the simplified gameplay? We'll have a better idea nearer the game's release next year.

"WITH ITS SINGLE-BUTTON GAMEPLAY, THIS IS A VERY ACCESSIBLE RACING GAME"



A cutesy *Kirby* game? It could never be anything but charming.

The single-button control system is unusual but oddly effective, though you'll have to learn new ways to corner.


eMag

JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

CAN RAVEN STAY ON TARGET WITH THE JEDI KNIGHT SERIES?

Since last year's *Jedi Outcast* proved to be a rare success story for the galaxy's most prestigious movie franchise, it's no surprise to see another addition to the Saber-swirling series, timed to hit the shelves alongside LucasArts' imminent influx of *Star Wars* titles. The latest instalment, *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*, sees hero of previous outings Kyle Katarn handing over the reins to a gifted young apprentice, and looks to provide players with their most thrilling taste of Jedi life to date.

Fulfilling the childhood dream of millions worldwide, gamers are invited to enrol in Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy to master the ways of the Force in the hope of taking their place among a new batch of Jedi Knights. As there are scarcely enough fully-fledged Jedi to maintain order around the galaxy, however, you can expect a rather hands-on approach to your training. Shortly after arriving at the Academy you'll be out on your first mission, and before long you'll be playing a vital role in uncovering the sinister intentions of an ancient Sith cult.

Before embarking on the action, you'll be able to fully customise your character's appearance (right down to the hilt on their Lightsaber, no less), and as the game progresses an RPG-style level-up system allows you to continuously shape their development. By learning different fighting styles, upgrading Sabers and choosing to acquire Dark or Light Force powers, you're extended a good amount of leeway as to how your character evolves.

Since the game takes place shortly after the events depicted in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, you can expect to come across some familiar faces, vehicles and locales from the saga's 'golden era'. Missions take place across a wider assortment of locations than before and feature enough task variation to keep the life of a budding Champion of the Force interesting. One scenario might place you at the helm of a Speeder Bike, whilst the next sees you stripped of your precious Lightsaber and forces you to battle through the mission purely as a first-person shoot-'em-up. Also, in a bid to prevent players quickly reaching a dead end this time around, you're now able to pick and choose from a selection of available missions and even skip over certain troublesome errands entirely.

Aside from all the new trimmings, the undisputed star of the show continues to be the Lightsaber. A good deal of polish has obviously gone into perfecting the Saber combat dynamics and has made the Jedi weapon of choice an absolute joy to wield. We could almost feel the Force flowing through us as we elegantly carved our way through the helpless legions of adversaries that foolishly stood in our path. Most notably, the ability to carry two Sabers in battle and the inclusion of the mighty twin-headed model throws a whole new repertoire of slick manoeuvres into the mix, allowing players to recreate the dazzling Jedi duels seen in the prequel movies.

Whether dodging and slicing our way through the obligatory complement of Stormtroopers and Bounty Hunters, or taking on fellow Saber-wielding Jedi in a battle of wits, the enhanced combat gameplay made the preview code a real struggle to put down. The Force is definitely strong with this one, and any wannabe Jedi should be in for a treat when LucasArts unleashes the finished version in the coming weeks.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts/Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
RELEASE: PC: Sept '03, Xbox: Nov '03
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (1-16 online)

Enrol in Luke Skywalker's academy for budding Jedi and embark on another Saber-swinging adventure across the *Star Wars* universe.

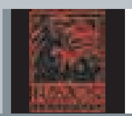
BEGUN THE WEB WAR HAS…

Once again players are able to challenge fellow Jedi from across the gaming galaxy through a series of online multiplayer modes, and Xbox Live gamers will be pleased to hear that they're invited to the online party this time. You can create your own Jedi or select from a range of recognisable characters from the *Star Wars* universe, kitting them out with the Lightsaber of your choice. Six modes of play await – each with customisable rules for the use of Jedi powers – and vary from the standard 16-player Deathmatch to a two-on-one Power Duel inspired by those final confrontations from *Episodes I* and *II*.

"THE LIGHTSABER COMBAT DYNAMICS MAKE THE JEDI WEAPON A JOY TO WIELD"



During your adventures you'll bump into a number of Saber-wielding adversaries who'll require some cunning swordsmanship to beat.



COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, Raven Software has been developing games since work began on the Amiga RPG *Black Crypt* back in 1988. Working closely with master FPS creator id, the team went on to enjoy huge success with the likes of *Heretic* and *Hexen* using the versatile *Doom* engine.

HISTORY

- **JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST** 2002 [PC, Xbox]
- **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE** 2001 [PC]
- **HERETIC** 1994 [PC]

The Lightsaber mechanics are superb and enhance every scuffle.

Some missions let you loose on a Speeder Bike.

"RAVEN WILL BRING INNOVATIVE, DYNAMIC, AND CHALLENGING GAMEPLAY THAT HONOURS THE LEGACY OF THE SERIES"

SIMON JEFFERY, PRESIDENT, LUCASARTS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BACK IN TRAINING

JEDI OUTCAST + THE ACADEMY x NEW SABERS = JEDI ACADEMY

MANHUNT



■ Gimps like this will be on your tail every step of the way, so watch yourself.

■ Items like the crowbar can be used for more than just beating people to death.

> "MANHUNT EXPLORES THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY IN A VICIOUS, SADISTIC TALE OF URBAN HORROR"
> *ROCKSTAR PRESS RELEASE*

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHO NEEDS ARNIE WHEN YOU'VE GOT THIS?

THE RUNNING MAN + TENCHU + GTA3 = MANHUNT





COMPANY PROFILE

Originally starting life as DMA Design before it invented the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise in its original top-down form, Rockstar North is now part of the Rockstar Games empire, which has development houses in locations such as Toronto, Vienna and San Diego in addition to North's Edinburgh studios.

HISTORY

- **GTA3** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO** 1999 [PSone]
- **LEMMINGS** 1990 [Amiga]



Having obstacles between you and angry gang members is clearly a good thing. Well, most of the time.

Putting on a happy face has never been easier if you're a member of the Smileys. Could this bloke be any freakier?

ROCKSTAR SAYS DON'T HUNT WHAT YOU CAN'T KILL…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar North
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Get ready for what Rockstar promises to be its most disturbing game yet. And no, we don't mean that in a State Of Emergency kind of way.

If there's one game that's captured popular attention on PS2 in the last year, it's *GTA: Vice City* – that's why we were more than interested to find out more about the latest game from the same developers, Rockstar North. We knew that it was a darker, more mature game than the last *GTA* offering, but Rockstar Games has been curiously tight-lipped regarding their big hope for Christmas 2003. Until now, that is.

Manhunt is a stealth-based third-person action adventure game built around a premise worthy of a Schwarzenegger movie – indeed, Rockstar Games admits that films have been a source of inspiration, citing *8MM*, *Jacob's Ladder* and *Marathon Man* among its influences. You play James Earl Cash, a convict facing the death penalty by lethal injection, who has been saved from his fate by a shady figure known only as The Director. This is no selfless act, however, as he places you in a series of 20 violent scenes where you must kill or be killed under the ever-present eye of the cameras he has placed around the levels. Basically, The Director wants to film the ultimate collection of snuff movies – all with you as the star. (Yes, *Manhunt* will carry an 18 rating when it's released.)

Set in disused urban environments such as shopping malls and prisons around an industrial rustbelt town, each area will be populated by one of seven street gangs of Hunters – people whose only objective is to kill you before you kill them. It isn't as simple as running in with your shotgun blasting, however. Cash will be able to carry three weapons – from a shard of glass to a shotgun, via crowbars or blackjack clubs – and the weapons on offer in any scene should have great impact on the pace of that level. Although there will be sections where gunplay features heavily, the emphasis seems to be firmly on hiding in the shadows and waiting for the right moment to present itself.

Using the on-screen 'audio radar' you can see where every moving Hunter is located, as well as the direction they are facing and their state of alert. This allows you to plan your attack in advance to minimise the risk of entering into hand-to-hand combat. You'll also have the ability to glance around corners without giving yourself away before moving in for the kill.

In the same way you use sound to detect the Hunters, any noise you make will let them know exactly where you are. Even running across gravel could let a waiting gang member know that you are about to come around the corner. Far better to check the radar, creep up slowly and jump them from behind. You'll see each street assassination as if watching The Director's footage, as the display cuts away from the in-game screen to look through the lens of one of his cameras. Although this is a great concept, it does offer some cause for concern, as control is removed from the player at exactly the moment you are expecting to perform a key action. It seems a shame that with such an atmospheric game, the player is denied any real involvement at these moments.

Regardless of this, *Manhunt* neatly sidesteps any suspicion of being a *GTA* clone and gets on with its own agenda of grown-up gaming. If the full game measures up to the depth of atmosphere and well thought out levels we have seen to date, then *Manhunt* looks set to be very interesting indeed.

"MANHUNT NEATLY SIDESTEPS ANY ACCUSATIONS OF BEING A GRAND THEFT AUTO CLONE"

HORSE AND HOUNDS

Described by Rockstar Games as a brutal future sport, the premise behind *Manhunt* reminds us of the movie *The Running Man*. Since sport means competition, you'll have to face a series of opponents, and here they're called The Hunters. These men may be paid by The Director or even blackmailed into taking part, but whatever their motivation, their objective remains the same: to kill you. The Hunters come in seven guises, the most distinctive of which has to be The Smileys. Their brightly painted faces are unnerving, to say the least…

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2



■ Players who choose to exploit every inch of the game's strategic depth will indoubtedly find *H&D2* most rewarding.

VENTURE BEHIND ENEMY LINES ARMED TO THE TEETH WITH STRATEGIC POSSIBILITIES…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Czech Republic
PUBLISHER: Gathering
DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Action/Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (Up to 32 online)

■ Take complete tactical control over your squad from any perspective you like in arguably the most captivating addition to the genre yet.

There was certainly a lot to like about the original *Hidden And Dangerous*, but for many the title's technical instability and distinctly flawed AI crippled the gaming experience beyond repair. Thankfully, Czech-based developer Illusion Softworks has spent the last four years ensuring the long-awaited sequel will not only address the problems that obscured much of the first game's undeniable quality, but should also take the squad-based genre to dizzy new heights.

A great deal of the fluid gameplay dynamics and impressive visuals can be attributed to an enhanced incarnation of the LS3D engine that helped earn gangster epic *Mafia* such deserved praise. The engine's versatility also allows for the ambitiously varied gameplay styles that look set to make *H&D2* a mouth-watering prospect for such a broad cross-section of gamers.

Whether you're a fan of real-time strategy wishing to orchestrate your troops around the battlefield from above, prefer the more traditional third-person role of squad commander, or even if you're simply an FPS aficionado after anything from an all-action fix to a taxing stealth-based challenge – strangely enough this game is for you. Yet, unlike so many other titles that try to offer all things to everyone, each of the game's diverse elements is presented with consummate depth and quality. Even the obligatory vehicle driving sections don't see these high standards slip.

Illusion has attempted to make each of the 23 missions as varied as possible, starting with the variety of surroundings in which these take place. Staged in just about every imaginable World War II setting, players will find themselves operating in barren deserts, arctic tundra, lush jungles, scenic mountain ranges and ravaged city streets, as well as in a range of indoor locales. You'll mostly be leading a hand-picked group of four elite SAS commandos (although several missions will require just one operative) who can be controlled using any combination of the several interfaces on offer.

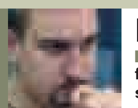
Perhaps the most useful of these is the Tactical mode, which freezes the action allowing you to pan out and fully assess the situation. Your squad members can then each be set a series of waypoints, complete with detailed instructions as to how they are to behave both en route and upon reaching these locations. Ideal for putting together a considered strategic approach and for allowing beginners to familiarise themselves with the commands, players can then set time running and either watch their bidding being carried out or jump back into the action as one of the team from either a first- or third-person perspective. Detailed commands can then be issued from this more hands-on viewpoint to all those in earshot of your character, ensuring every member of your squad is always behaving exactly as you intend.

The beauty of the game's immense strategic depth is that players can delve beneath the surface to whatever level they wish. After spending some quality time with the latest build we were blown away by *H&D2*'s phenomenal scope and potential breadth of appeal. Those willing to invest the time and fully explore the tactical possibilities look set to be heavily rewarded.

ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH?

***Hidden And Dangerous 2* is a real stickler for detail, and the high levels of authenticity adorning every aspect of play put you firmly in the boots of an SAS commando. Although this realism can make your characters' lives more difficult in terms of damage severity and carrying capacity, for the most part it adds a great feeling of quality to the game. In the stealth sections, for instance, the razor-sharp AI demonstrates all the awareness found in the likes of *Hitman 2*, but simply stealing a dead soldier's uniform won't fool the enemy if it's riddled with bullet holes and soaked in claret, or if you've still got a British weapon in your hands.**

"WE WERE BLOWN AWAY BY H&D2'S PHENOMENAL SCOPE AND POTENTIAL BREADTH OF APPEAL"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Petr Vochozka began developing computer games for the Amiga and PC at the age of 16 and went on to found Illusion Softworks in 1997. The studio formed a close relationship with publisher Take 2 and enjoyed huge success with *Hidden And Dangerous* and *Mafia*.

HISTORY

- **MAFIA** 2002 [PC]
- **FLYING HEROES** 2000 [PC]
- **HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS** 1999 [PC]

A souped-up version of the LS3D engine seen in *Mafia* allows for all kinds of vehicular action in the gameplay.

"HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2 IS UNPRECEDENTED IN ITS LEVELS OF AMBITION, INNOVATION AND DETAIL"

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2 PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

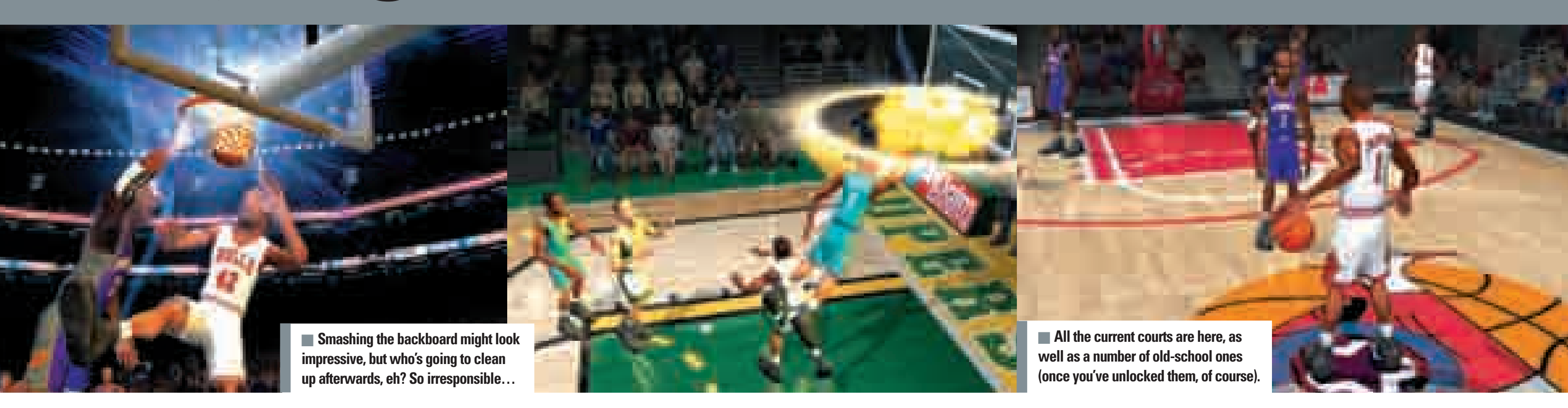
WHATEVER YOU WANT IT TO BE...

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS - BUGS x POSSIBILITIES = H&D2

There's a great deal of variety in mission types – even the squad-based sections should encourage different styles of play.

You can hand pick your squad from a pool of 30 skilled operatives, then kit them out yourself or let the computer do it.

NBA JAM



Smashing the backboard might look impressive, but who's going to clean up afterwards, eh? So irresponsible…

All the current courts are here, as well as a number of old-school ones (once you've unlocked them, of course).

OR WOULD YOU PREFER A GOOD CHUNKY MARMALADE INSTEAD?

Ah, nostalgia – nothing beats looking back at your past and picking out the best bits. In terms of sports games, we'd probably have to highlight playing *NBA Jam* on the SNES; for blistering basketball action with your mates (usually involving lots of shouting), it simply couldn't be beaten. Of course, the SNES games were basically ports of the Midway arcade titles, which were really rather good. But since Midway turned the licence over to Acclaim, the games have been on a slippery downward slope.

Thankfully, it looks like Acclaim has learnt a few lessons since the dog-awful *NBA Jam* titles on the Saturn, PSone and N64 – the latest game in the series goes back to its Midway roots and tries to reclaim the classic gameplay in the process. The results so far appear to be relatively successful and are certainly quite a lot of fun to play, at least in terms of recapturing the essence of what made the original so enjoyable.

In case you don't already know, *NBA Jam* falls slap in the middle of the arcade/realism divide – while it retains all the basketball aesthetics that games like *NBA Street 2* have shunned (like proper sports kit, real indoor arenas and a very small handful of rules), it still focuses on arcade-style action. Essentially, what this means is that it's a cut-down version of the sport with as much over-the-top action as Acclaim could squeeze into it; and with three players to a team, small courts and a massive range of excessive dunks, you're guaranteed a fast-paced game every time.

Not surprisingly, a return to the series' roots means that while the graphics have been suitably improved, everything is pretty much as it was in the original arcade games – from setting your players 'on fire' and shoving the opposition on its arse to having the same commentator. There are, however, some additions too, such as the Jam meter (which builds up to reveal your team's high-scoring 'sweet spot' on court) and a Legends tournament that allows you unlock the great ballers of old, plus the opportunity to create your own players.

This kick in the pants is exactly what the series needed and we just hope that in a time where *NBA Street 2* rules the roost, it's not just going to be old-school gamers who'll be jammin'…

"THIS IS ONE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT THE FEEL OF BASKETBALL BUT DON'T CARE MUCH FOR THE RULES"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: Acclaim Studios Austin
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

Acclaim returns again with an update of the classic *NBA Jam* series, but can it still play with the big boys?



The best thing about *NBA Jam* – namely setting your players 'on fire' through quality play – is still very much part of the gameplay.


eMag

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: OBLIVION LOST



■ You'll have free run of the many deserted settlements and facilities you stumble across. Save for those mutants, of course…

■ The serene outdoor settings contrast starkly with the gritty industrial areas where the trouble first started.

■ It was a long and arduous battle but our gallant hero finally took down the mutated scaffold beast. Or something.

"THE PLAYER WILL START AS A STALKER NEWBIE WHO BEGINS TO EXPLORE THE ZONE AND WILL DISCOVER ITS HIDDEN DANGERS"

THQ PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. – THE SCARY SIDE OF SCIENCE

EXTERMINATION - FALLOUT x NUCLEAR FREAKS = S.T.A.L.K.E.R.



COMPANY PROFILE

Formed in 1995, it wasn't until two years later that Ukraine-based GSC Game World came around to its true calling. With a growing and respectable PC catalogue to its name, the firm is looking for a game to raise its profile and it could well have found it in *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*

HISTORY

- COSSACKS: ART OF WAR 2002 [PC]
- CODENAME OUTBREAK 2001 [PC]
- COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS 2001 [PC]

NUCLEAR DISASTERS AREN'T ALL BAD, Y'KNOW…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Ukraine
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: GSC Game World
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

A first-person shooter from a relatively unknown source isn't usually cause for celebration, but this free-roaming post-nuclear effort certainly stands out from the crowd. And no, it's not just mutated…

Despite being mostly lethal, radiation has something of a reputation for making the impossible, well, possible. From countless Hollywood appearances to its birthing of half of the Marvel universe in one way or another, the media has glamorised the nuclear threat. And while most of us are in no direct danger from it, there are plenty out there who know the fear first-hand. As games like *Fallout* have proved, this fear both of the impending threat and aftermath can make for a great game setting as well as presenting true suspense and some unique enemies that are able to bend the rules a little.

Much of the literature regarding *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* makes constant reference to an area called the Zone – this is the area surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant where a large-scale accident has occurred six years prior to the start of the game. Naturally, this area is quickly cordoned off but the authorities are powerless to stop the adventurers determined to retrieve any items imbued with strange properties. You take the role of one such raider, overcoming the resistance of military and mutants alike to stake your claim on the unknown wealth that lies in the restricted area. Suffice to say that it's not only the inanimate things that have been changed by the fallout…

Using the X-Ray engine, GSC has managed to achieve a much more natural look than in many shooters, particularly with its external areas which employ realistic foliage and weather effects to spectacular effect. Trees and grass impress far more than the cardboard cut-outs and flat green textures we're all too used to from less ambitious titles, and the sheer fact that each of these actually serves a purpose as well as looking pretty (the game's wildlife makes its home just about anywhere) just makes it even more impressive. Although it probably won't come on that much further, we're really looking forward to seeing just how good the finished article will look on a monster PC.

The real ace up *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s sleeve is its freedom – with 30 square kilometres of the nuclear aftermath rendered and given life (both natural and otherwise), you'll have your work cut out scouring the entire area. GSC is keen to push the benefits of the life simulation system too, so this huge expanse will be populated by countless animals as well as less natural creatures, all of which will have their own agendas and intelligence which can be plainly seen even at this early stage. None of it is just for show, either – if you fear that some of the little critters may be contaminated or you just plain don't like them, the many firearms you'll stumble across can be used to terminate the little (and not so little) guys.

The FPS genre is undeniably crowded and tough to break into, but we've been impressed with every aspect of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* so far. With its dreams of being the next big thing and a surprising amount of innovation and attention to detail, GSC is clearly going all out to give the PC market something to look forward to when the *Half-Life 2* frenzy has died down.

FREE FOR ALL

Arguably *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s biggest selling point is that the player is free to explore the surroundings of Chernobyl at their leisure. Even from these screens you can pick out areas where this freedom would come into its own. The promise also remains that all the while the game's story will be driven forward depending on the player's actions until you eventually end up with one of eight unique finales. We're particularly looking forward to the Toxic Crusader ending…



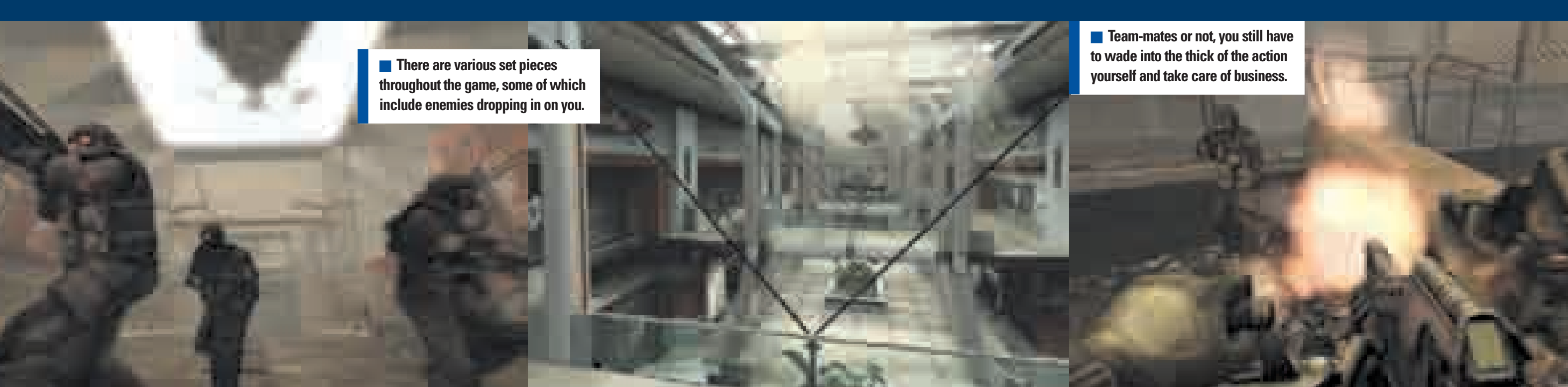
"GSC HAS MANAGED TO ACHIEVE A MUCH MORE NATURAL LOOK THAN IN MANY SHOOTERS"



As is now customary, you'll be able to hijack any disused vehicles you find on your travels.

The life of a Stalker is not an easy one – there's always a radioactive freak or two in your way.

KILLZONE



■ There are various set pieces throughout the game, some of which include enemies dropping in on you.

■ Team-mates or not, you still have to wade into the thick of the action yourself and take care of business.

HALO SCHMALO – SONY ATTEMPTS TO TAKE THINGS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Netherlands
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Guerilla Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

■ The trump card up Sony's sleeve relies on intense action, team-work and frantic gunplay to deliver the goods.

PS2

It used to be known as *Kin*, Sony has touted it as a *Halo* beater and it's been kept under wraps away from prying eyes. But finally, Guerilla Studios has relented and allowed the world a peek under the covers of its first ever project – a team FPS that's been in the works for nearly two years.

Essentially a story of interplanetary war, you play four soldiers trying to protect Earth from the militaristic Helghast forces after a bomb attack on a human colony. Control is restricted to one member of the squad while the remainder of the team is AI-driven, retreating from fire if they take heavy damage but battling alongside you whenever possible. The soldiers all have different attributes with one being skilled at stealth and sniping, one being a commando type that can handle heavy weaponry and so on. You'll face different challenges and experiences depending on which character you pick, so the incentive is there to play through the game again.

The plot may sound more camp sci-fi than all-out war, but plasma guns and aliens are nowhere to be seen. Guerilla has eschewed a futuristic theme and turned instead to real-life conflicts such as the battle of the Somme and Vietnam, keeping *Killzone* gritty and realistic. The in-game artillery reinforces this view, with 21 weapons available including grenades, rocket launchers and mini-guns. Set pieces such as collapsing bridges and enemies dropping in from helicopters are strewn throughout the game, so it feels as though you've been thrown into the middle of a chaotic war. What this all adds up to is a game that's high on action but requires some tactical thought, as well as using your team-mates to full advantage. Not surprisingly, *Killzone* will also ship with an online mode, though Sony's currently keeping quiet over what this might feature.

■ The jungle settings are reminiscent of Vietnam, except the war is now between the Earth-loyal ISA and the Helghast.

Obviously, it's still too early to say if *Killzone* will live up to its lofty ambitions – there are still some issues to sort out, such as the fogging and a sludgy frame rate, plus we're too jaded from overly-hyped titles in the past to believe anything until we've actually sat down and played it more thoroughly. Regardless though, Sony has high hopes for this game, so you can no doubt expect to be hearing a lot more about *Killzone* before it hits the shelves next year.

"KILLZONE IS USING EVERY TRICK FROM SET PIECES TO CLEVER TEAM AI TO RECREATE SEAT-OF-YOUR-PANTS SKIRMISHES"


eMag

JAK II: RENEGADE

JAK'S GONE ALL TOMMY VERCETTI ON US…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Platform/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Top-notch platform action meets the epic *Vice City* framework in Jak and Daxter's new genre-blurring adventure.

After bringing you a look at Naughty Dog's incredibly ambitious plans for the *Jak And Daxter* saga back in issue 6, we were left intrigued as to how the multitude of promised new features would come together in the finished game. Well, having got hold of a preview version of *Jak II: Renegade* and given it a spin, we now have a much better idea of just how impressive the duo's latest adventure is shaping up to be.

The game makes an excellent first impression thanks to the stunning quality of the visuals, tightly knitted together with some delightfully smooth animation.

ALTERED BEAST

All that Dark Eco has turned the Jak we know and love into a different man altogether. He's visibly meaner than before and, much like The Hulk, can accumulate enough rage to transform into a more destructive alter ego. The inclusion of guns also adds a whole new dimension to the traditional gameplay, while our hero's new attitude makes controlling him a rather different experience. Thankfully, Daxter returns as his usual hyperactive self and helps keep humour levels up amidst the bleaker context by playing the wisecracking clown to Jak's deeply troubled straight man.

> "A HOST OF UNORTHODOX GAMEPLAY ELEMENTS AND DISTINCTLY DARKER THEMES DEFY THE GENRE'S TRADITIONS"

Character models are noticeably cleaner than before, but the real attractions are the stunningly detailed environments that become gorgeously drenched with sophisticated lighting effects as the dynamic day-to-night cycle ticks by.

Yet while the elaborate graphical revamp helps to set *Jak II: Renegade* apart from the crowd, a host of unorthodox gameplay elements and distinctly darker themes defy the genre's traditions even further. In fact, although we were quick to draw parallels between several of the game's new features and the *Grand Theft Auto* series, we weren't prepared for just how much inspiration Naughty Dog has obviously taken from the likes of *Vice City*.

While Jak's all-new ability to hijack any passing vehicle that takes his fancy or go on unprovoked killing sprees around the bustling city streets brings to mind the exploits of Tommy Vercetti, the resemblance doesn't stop there. As with Rockstar's crime epic you'll constantly find yourself taking care not to arouse any unwanted interest from the patrolling police while roaming the sprawling city streets (between taking missions from your various contacts, admiring the shifting weather conditions and even wielding a devastating arsenal of firearms).

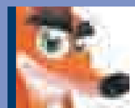
Fans of the original outing will undoubtedly be left wondering how such a radical departure from the conventional sugar-coated platform recipe came about. The opening cut-scene holds all the answers as we see Jak being separated from his furry orange companion and escorted to a secret military research facility. Here he remains imprisoned for the next two years undergoing all manner of experiments until Daxter finally catches up with his old pal and stages a daring rescue. Unfortunately, Jak has been pumped so full of the mysterious Dark Eco that his personality is virtually unrecognisable. Exacting a bloody vengeance on his captors is all he seems to care about, hence the far grittier edge to his actions and his complete lack of respect for the laws of the land.

It might seem like a strange marriage of concepts, but mixing the quality platform action of the first game with the ambitious framework of *Vice City* actually builds on the basics rather effectively. The various gameplay styles Naughty Dog likes to combine in its platform titles are gelled together into a more wholesome and continuous adventure by the seamless *GTA*-style context. Purist platform gamers may argue that the game ventures too far outside the genre's boundaries, but since each element is served with such panache and attention to detail the overall package should have enough quality to make *Jak II* a deserved mainstream hit.



The massive city that keeps Jak prisoner to begin with is home to tons of inhabitants, including some rather odd-looking ones…

JAK II: RENEGADE
PLAYSTATION2



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Despite developing games since the mid Eighties, Naughty Dog had to wait a decade before hitting the big time with Sony's flagship PSone platformer, *Crash Bandicoot*. Naughty Dog's first PS2 outing, *Jak And Daxter*, also proved a huge hit and paved the way for an ambitious sequel.

HISTORY

■ JAK AND DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY 2001 [PS2]
■ CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED 2001 [PSone]
■ CRASH BANDICOOT 1996 [PSone]

"JAK II: RENEGADE PROVIDES FAR MORE FREEDOM AND IMMERSION THAN GAMERS HAVE EXPERIENCED BEFORE"

JASON RUBIN, PRESIDENT, NAUGHTY DOG

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

NAUGHTY BY NAME...

JAK + BAD ATTITUDE x VICE CITY = JAK II: RENEGADE

■ Unfortunately, the game doesn't look quite as lovely as these shots would have you believe, but it's still quite nice.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3



The multitude of options is astonishing, and really proves the attention to detail here.

The set-piece system has once again been tweaked so you'll need to practise all over again.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CONTINUING TO EVOLVE THE PES SERIES

PRO EVO 2 + REFINEMENT + EXTRA EVERYTHING = PRO EVO 3

"PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3 REPRESENTS A MAMMOTH STEP FORWARD FOR THE SERIES, WITH EVERY ASPECT REWORKED"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE



COMPANY PROFILE

Konami's catalogue is enough to shame many developers and publishers, featuring numerous genre-defining titles and some of the most popular current series. Founded way back in 1973, Konami's experience within the industry has become increasingly apparent over recent years and continues to make it a key player.

HISTORY

- **DANCING STAGE MEGAMIX** 2003 [PS2]
- **AZURE DREAMS** 1997 [PSone]
- **GRADIUS** 1998 [NES]



Not something you see every day, but now you can adjust referee leniency. Perhaps one day, maybe…

Graphically, the game has come on in leaps and bounds since *Pro Evo 2*, from character models and likenesses to surroundings.

HOW MUCH MORE EVOLUTION CAN THERE BE? NOT THAT WE'RE ARGUING…

With every instalment in Konami's consistently impressive *Pro Evolution* series – from its humble *ISS* origins to recent *Winning Eleven* glories – we've seen an experience rapidly approaching realism both visually and in terms of accuracy. The series' PS2 exclusivity in the UK has been the bane of many a single console owner's gaming life, and while we'd kill (no, we would) for an Xbox Live version of the game, its spiritual home will always be the PS2. Somehow the series has managed to escape the 'same game, different name' branding of many similar titles and there's only one reason for this – Konami puts so much into this series that each game stands up perfectly well as a unique title.

Unsurprisingly, we've had *Winning Eleven 7* (*Pro Evolution*'s Eastern sister series) since it was unleashed upon Japan and it just seems to improve with every match – showcasing a level of fluidity and style that places it in a league of its own, this will probably be the closest the two franchises have been yet. From initial impressions, many of the issues with *PES2* and *WE6* have been sorted out and the addition of advantage and handball rules, as well as some improvements to the existing rulebook, has made for a much more lifelike re-creation. Even more impressively, the oft-forgotten PAL territory is getting a special treat with *Pro Evo 3* – Konami has said that the UK version won't suffer from the occasional slowdown and stuttering of the Japanese version. Potentially, we could see the *Pro Evolution* series outdo its Eastern counterpart for the first time, something we'd never expected but would like to see all the same.

Despite the fact that this is a series that gets regularly updated, Konami still manages to add enough new features and playability to each follow-up to keep them surprisingly fresh. This time around, a more complex and managerial Master League is one of the best features, but better still is the number of smaller improvements. The ability to play club teams versus nationals, optional manual goalkeeping, fixed player assignment (which helps prevent large multiplayer sessions from getting too scrappy) and some properly licensed teams and kits all add to the already impressive package but, sadly, online play which was hinted at by several Japanese previews of the game has failed to emerge – a horrible string of misunderstandings had us longing for something we were never to receive.

To the untrained eye, *Pro Evo 3* may seem an awful lot like more of the same but, as we've said, you'll really need to devote a lot of time and effort to this if you're to learn the full extent of its augmentation. Fears that the tricks and skills would result a turn for the worse in terms of gameplay have proved unfounded – most of the new moves are simply new animations for receiving or playing the ball that give the game that much more flair and class. This is clearly not a game cursed by vanity either, and to say that its gameplay matches its appearance would be a drastic understatement.

Of course, most of our experience so far has been with the Japanese version of the game but our taste of an early PAL version has confirmed one thing – this is looking like the kind of game that will sell consoles.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: Sport
PLAYERS: 1-8

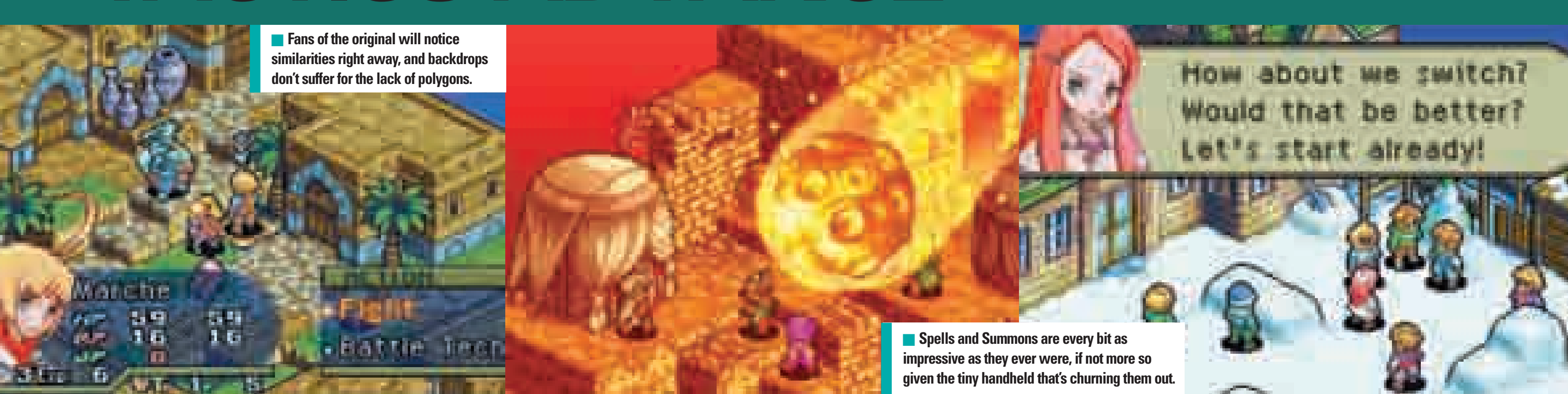
Konami takes football one step further as the *PES* series evolves.

SHOPPING AROUND

One of the most obvious new additions to the *Pro Evolution/Winning Eleven* series is the inclusion of the Shop – a wonderful place where your hard-earned currency can be put to good use buying extra kits, players and even teams to make the game that much sweeter. Now you'll need to play through those cups and leagues more than just once if you want access to every unlockable. These extras range from the expected (additional teams and Master League players) to some slightly more bizarre new features – ball trails, Edit mode parts and new transfer options all lie in wait for the persistent player.

"PES3 SHOWCASES A LEVEL OF FLUIDITY AND STYLE THAT PLACES IT IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN"

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE



Fans of the original will notice similarities right away, and backdrops don't suffer for the lack of polygons.

Spells and Summons are every bit as impressive as they ever were, if not more so given the tiny handheld that's churning them out.

GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT…

Ever since the mighty *Advance Wars* joined forces with Game Boys across the land, strategy games of all shapes and sizes have followed suit in migrating to the handheld. A typically more sedate genre than today's adrenaline-seeking console owner tends to buy into, thinking gamers have been ushered towards either the crowded PC market or the ever-maturing handheld scene. The former is more or less a given – excellent PC strategy games are far from a rarity – but the prospect of being able to enjoy games of the same standard on the move is certainly enticing. We've tried not to be ensnared by the Japanese release of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* so as not to ruin it for ourselves – save for a few moments of wavering resolve, we've done well so far, and by the time you read this our sanity should have been restored by the US release. Praise be.

First impressions being as important as they are, *FFTA* is extremely fortunate that its creators have blessed us with some of the prettiest games in recent memory. Suffice to say, this will be no exception and from the mere fact that these screens aren't far removed from *Tactics* on PSone, you know the GBA is being pushed pretty hard. In fact, the game will offer three display modes to make the most of your chosen platform, including enhancements for when blown-up on a TV screen via a Game Boy Player – we can't wait to witness the already lush visuals running through Nintendo's much-lauded connectivity, especially having seen how well the more recent GBA titles have fared.

It certainly won't be without competition by the time it arrives over here (*Advance Wars* and *Tactics Ogre* are already available with *Onimusha Tactics* due shortly, among others) but from previous experience and a brief encounter with the game at E3, we've got a feeling *FFTA* will be something special. Like so much these days it might be superficially 'more of the same', but, digging deeper, it's the subtleties and detail that will set it apart from predecessors and rivals alike. Promising a level of customisation and depth currently lacking from the GBA catalogue, and an epic quest to boot, we can see *FFTA* finding its way onto British Game Boys long before the official UK release.

"FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN, FFTA CAPTURES THE FEEL AND MAGIC OF THE PSONE GAME TO A TEE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Square Enix
RELEASE: Q4 '03 (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

The follow-up to Square's PSone thinker arrives on the GBA – clearly the place to be for turn-based strategy games.



Arrogance aside, this screen is a perfect example of the awesome level of detail in *FFTA*.


eMag

TIME CRISIS 3



Facing a large crowd of enemies can prove tough, unless you're smart enough to pick out the one piece of scenery that'll explode when shot.

DON'T THROW AWAY THAT LIGHTGUN JUST YET…

DETAILS
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

Time Crisis 3 gets a home console makeover, complete with all-new modes that add much-needed longevity to the game.

> "DESPITE BEING ALMOST IDENTICAL TO THE LAST GAME, TIME CRISIS 3 LOOKS LIKE IT'LL DO WELL WHEN IT HITS THE SHELVES"

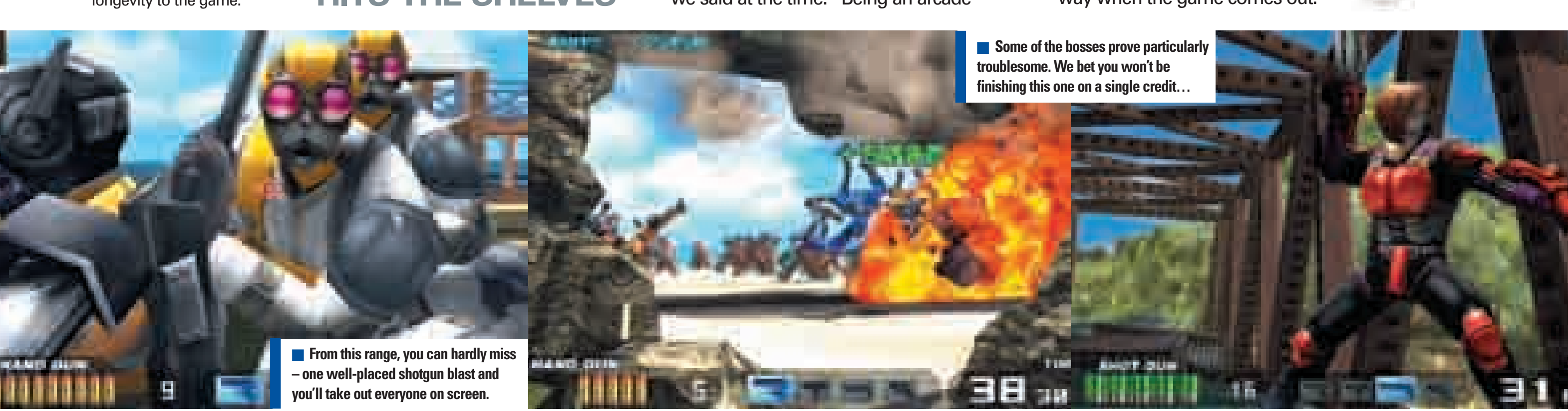
It had to happen, didn't it? Having seen *Time Crisis 3* perform fairly well in arcades, it doesn't come as much of a surprise that the game is set to land on the PS2 come the end of the year. If you've got a G-Con 2 then this should come as good news – you can at least be glad there's something else to play now besides dodgy *Resident Evil* blasters (*Dead Aim* excepted, that is).

Of course, if you read our review of the arcade version in issue 3, you'll know what we said at the time: "Being an arcade game, it's still fun for a quick blast – but we doubt we'd say the same thing if this was a £40 PS2 title." With a PS2 release now a reality, we stick by our word that as the arcade game stands, we'd be loath to pay full price for it. Still, Namco is doing its best to ensure that there is enough replay value in the package to command more than five minutes of your precious playing time.

So, what extras will you get for the equivalent of 40 credits in your local arcade? Quite a lot actually, though you'll have to work hard to get your hands on any of it. With only five credits available from the outset and even the easiest difficulty proving a challenge, finishing the game isn't going to be easy – but it's the only way to unlock any of the extra modes (though no doubt Namco has ramped up the difficulty as another way of increasing the longevity).

Should you manage to complete the game, you'll find the return of the Crisis Missions from *Time Crisis 2* – specific objectives that have to be completed within a strict time limit – as well as a new mode entitled Rescue Mission. It's here that Namco has gone out on a limb to introduce a new concept to the *Time Crisis* mix, in the form of sniper rifle gameplay; think *Silent Scope* but with *Time Crisis* elements and you'll get the gist.

While we're not entirely convinced that the *Time Crisis* series has evolved enough since last time, there's no denying that the PS2 needs a good gun game – and *Time Crisis 3* is at least fun to play. Let's hope G-Con 2 owners feel the same way when the game comes out.

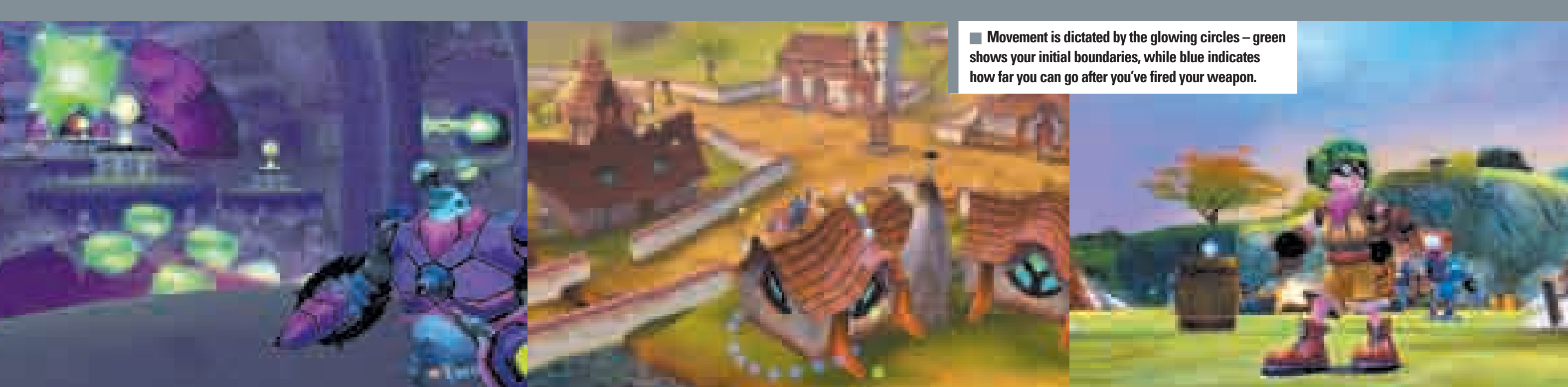


From this range, you can hardly miss – one well-placed shotgun blast and you'll take out everyone on screen.

Some of the bosses prove particularly troublesome. We bet you won't be finishing this one on a single credit…


eMag

PILLAGE



Movement is dictated by the glowing circles – green shows your initial boundaries, while blue indicates how far you can go after you've fired your weapon.

WANTED: PUBLISHER FOR STRATEGY ACTION GAME. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: TBA
DEVELOPER: Zed Two
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Arcade/Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

Strategy action with a unique twist – *Pillage* is a game that sounds slightly odd but plays really well. Now if only someone would consider releasing it…

PS2 **Game development is a fickle business.** With games fanatics constantly complaining about the lack of original titles being released, and game publishers unwilling to take a risk on something even slightly different for fear of it flopping and losing them money, a smaller but more adventurous developer like Zed Two is left in a bit of a bind. Despite coming up with some great ideas for a game, the lack of a publisher leaves it floundering before the finish line and, unfortunately, that's exactly the situation in which *Pillage* finds itself.

While you might not be able to tell from the screenshots, *Pillage* has a number of similarities with Konami's cult classic RPG *Vandal Hearts* and, to a lesser extent, Team 17's *Worms* series. Yes, it's a strange combination but one that's totally justified; with plenty of RPG stylings when it comes to enhancing the abilities of your team, and a strong focus on turn-based character movement and combat, *Pillage* has several strings to its bow. The problem is, it's the kind of game that most people would ignore if told about it – it's only once you sit down and play it that you stand any chance of the penny actually dropping.

The story of the game – mysterious monsters with a strange regenerative power descend on an innocent land, and only you can stop them – serves only as a precursor to the turn-based action. As hero Low, it's your job to lead a team of two to five people across 19 different stages, although your objectives change depending on the situation; you might have to reach a certain location within a stage, defend a stronghold from invading armies or destroy all the monsters before the time limit runs out. How you do it, though, remains a constant – you can perform a combination of moves and attacks with each of your team-mates in any one turn, before leaving them in one of three states (Heal, Defend or Neutral) and watching the enemy retaliate.

Like we said, it's a lot like *Worms* – only with a point to it. It's also great fun, which is exactly what you want from a game. Of course, whether you'll actually get to try it for yourself all depends on a plucky publisher stepping forward. Let's hope someone's feeling brave.

"PILLAGE SOUNDS A BIT ODD, BUT PLAY IT AND YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PUT IT DOWN"



The red arrows marks out your destination on the more straightforward levels, but you'll have to get past those pesky aliens first…




eMag

TOP SPIN

BETTER THAN VIRTUA TENNIS? YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS…

It's over 30 years since *Pong* first made us realise that tennis made for an immensely entertaining videogame concept. And from what we've played of Microsoft's forthcoming addition to the genre it's a sport that can still deliver some of the most addictive gaming around. Developer Power And Magic has got plenty of tricks up its sleeve to help it dislodge reigning champ *Virtua Tennis* from the top spot in the rankings.

"We really wanted to shoot at total realism in terms of the visuals," explains *Top Spin*'s production director, Stephane Dupas. "We invested a lot of time developing the technology to ensure we had enough textural effects to make hair look different to skin, and enough polygons to have a fully motion-captured 3D crowd – it was important to us that everything looked just like the real thing."

Motion capture sessions with the likes of Lleyton Hewitt, and many gruelling hours studying photos of Anna Kournikova have made *Top Spin* an incredible visual spectacle, but don't expect such unrivalled realism to carry over into the gameplay. "Despite the fact it's so visually realistic, we never wanted to do a complex simulation of tennis," says Dupas. "Our game was always meant to be accessible to an audience larger than just tennis fans, so we tried to find a balance between simulation visuals and arcade-style gameplay."

In fact, the core gameplay dynamics are among the most instantly accessible we've ever witnessed, with a clear focus on delivering exciting rallies rather than replicating the inherent difficulty of the sport. Yet Dupas emphasises *Top Spin*'s efforts to pull off such an arcade style without producing an overly shallow affair. "We felt a lot of frustration with the recent tennis games," he says. "*Virtua Tennis*, for example, is a brilliant game – very easy to pick up, tremendous gameplay, gorgeous graphics and nice animation – but after five hours we got really, really bored of it. Firstly, the actions you can perform are far too limited – tennis is all about surprising your opponent by performing a shot that's not expected, and with only the D-pad and one button it's very difficult to create all of the situations we wanted. With *Top Spin* all the buttons of the pad are used".

While beginners can instantly enjoy some exhilarating rallies and leave feeling like experts in no time, a couple of embarrassing whitewashes at the hands of Dupas himself painfully illustrates the amount of potential gameplay depth to be mastered. For instance, an important feature of more advanced contests is the intriguing 'In The Zone' meter – a product of the in-depth consultations with coaches and professional players who emphasised the psychological nature of the sport. "Basically, the better you play, the *better* you'll play," says Dupas. "Winning points, especially when using risky shots, will eventually put your player 'in the zone'. Tennis is very much a psychological game, so when you're focussed and on top of your game more things seem to fall for you."

While Microsoft is quite rightly touting the massive potential for *Top Spin* to become an online phenomenon, a detailed Career mode ensures players who can't go Live certainly won't be short-changed. It might only be 75 per cent complete, but this is already shaping up to be one of the all-time tennis greats.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Power And Magic
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4 (Live compatible)

Total visual realism meets thrilling arcade gameplay as the age-old tennis genre gets updated.

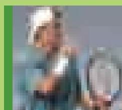
'SIM NOSE JOB'

There's a rather odd selection of 16 meticulously modelled pros to choose from along with 16 fictional players, and a further 200 characters from the game's Career mode can be accessed via a random selector. Yet in a bid to give everyone a unique identity for their on- and offline career, the Player Creator interface allows for an incredible degree of customisation. Almost a plastic surgery mini-game in itself, every imaginable contour of the face can be manipulated to your requirements. The level of detail may seem like overkill, but more than 60 close-up animations can be performed to express emotions between points, further shaping your player's image as a whiner or someone who likes to rub their opponent's nose in defeat.

"TOP SPIN IS ALREADY SHAPING UP TO BE ONE OF THE ALL-TIME TENNIS GREATS"



Players can expect a constant 60fps whether taking on the computer or competing in a tournament online.



CONTRIBUTOR PROFILE

Though still only 22, Lleyton Hewitt already has 19 major titles under his belt. The former world number one gladly contributed to the *Top Spin* motion capture sessions to ensure his videogame character came complete with his unique playing style and trademark backhand.

HISTORY

- **WIMBLEDON** 2002 [Winner]
- **US OPEN** 2001 [Winner]
- **ADELAIDE** 1998 [Winner]

The in-depth Career mode lets you create a unique-looking player and train them up to suit your style of play.

She may not be such a hot-shot on court, but sticking Miss Kournikova on the box cover should arouse plenty of interest from non-tennis purists.

"OUR GAME WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE ACCESSIBLE TO AN AUDIENCE LARGER THAN JUST TENNIS FANS"

STEPHANE DUPAS, PRODUCTION DIRECTOR, POWER AND MAGIC

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

A NEW WORLD CHAMP?

VIRTUA TENNIS + POLISH x LONGEVITY = TOP SPIN

NFL STREET



This being street-style American football, it goes without saying that the tackles are somewhat more aggressive than in the real game.

With numerous different street locations for each game you'll never want to go back to that boring old gridiron ever again.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA Sports BIG
DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-2 Online)

EA's *Street* format spreads to the world of American football, making it a whole lot more accessible to people who aren't from the US.

BLUE 22! BLUE 22! HUTT, HUTT AND ALL THAT JAZZ…

Of all the developers that exist today, you know you can trust Electronic Arts to find a winning formula and then milk it for all it's worth – such is the secret of success in this day and age. Having already discovered that adding 'street' attitude to basketball pays dividends in terms of winning over a whole new market, it was only a matter of time before the brains at EA thought of doing the same with other sporting concepts. And so we now have the joys of *NFL Street* on our hands.

Of course, this isn't exactly a bad thing – after all, we much preferred the vibrancy of *NBA Street 2* against drier titles such as *NBA 2K3* or *Inside Drive*, so seeing the same arcade stylings applied to a sport as inaccessible as American football can only be for the better. Essentially a stripped-down seven-on-seven version of the sport with added 'attitude' (read: insults, showboating and a distinct disregard for most of the rules), the game still features many of the elements that make up American football – downs, plays, touchdowns and all. However, *NFL Street* has many characteristics that have been lifted straight from its basketball-flavoured cousin – and again, this is no bad thing.

For example, just as the key to winning in *NBA Street* was humiliating your opponent with as many special fakes and dunks as possible, *NFL Street* also allows you to bust out fly moves all over yo' opponent's punk ass. Really. By pressing the L1 button, you can add modifiers to your regular moves (throwing passes without looking or behind your back, or even dancing your way into the end zone), pumping up your Gamebreaker meter in the process. This in turn lets you level the opposition with a devastating play or plough their attacks into the dirt, depending on whether you're on offence or defence.

Understandably though, how much you're likely to enjoy *NFL Street* all depends on what you want from an American football game; those of you who prefer as much realism as possible (short of donning the armour and heading for the gridiron yourself) might not appreciate the bastardisation of the sport that *NFL Street* offers. Still, with all 32 NFL teams, over 300 players, numerous game modes and even online play for PS2 owners, there's no doubting that it'll certainly catch the attention of people who think 'proper' American football is a little bit on the heavy side for them.

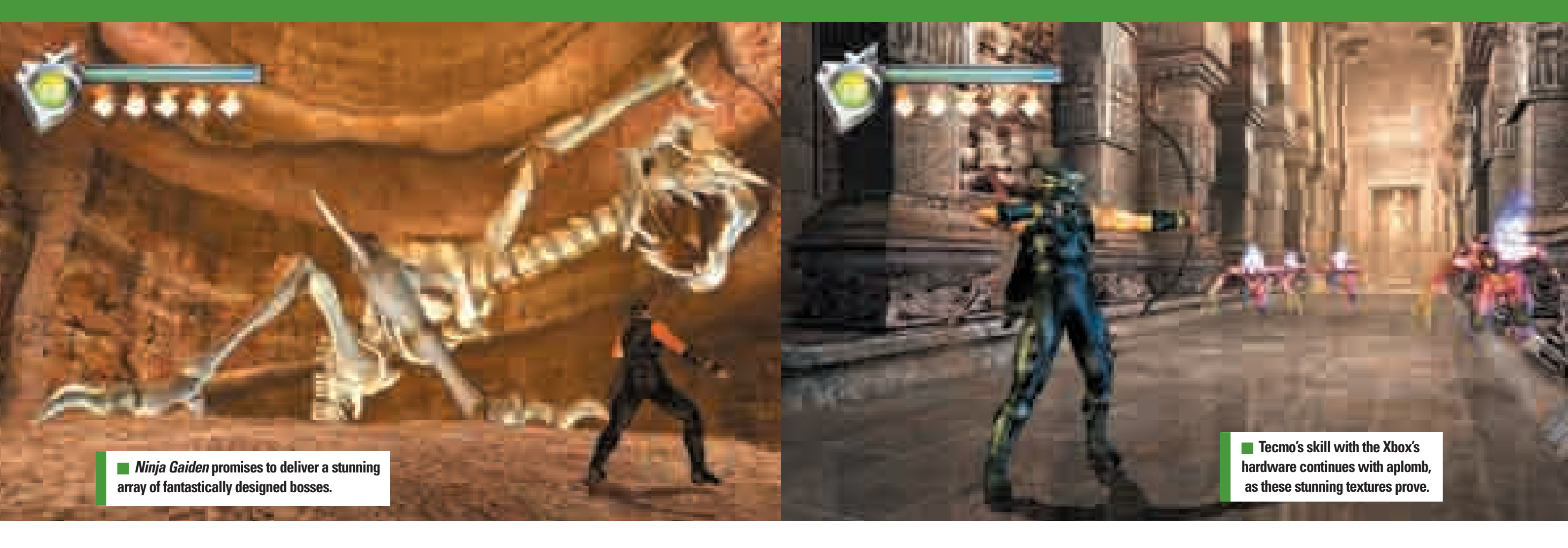


Once you've got the ball, showboating is the only way to increase your Gamebreaker – but it makes you much easier to take down…

"NFL STREET IS THE PERFECT TONIC FOR PEOPLE WHO THINK MADDEN IS TOO COMPLICATED"


eMag

NINJA GAIDEN



Ninja Gaiden promises to deliver a stunning array of fantastically designed bosses.

Tecmo's skill with the Xbox's hardware continues with aplomb, as these stunning textures prove.

TEAM NINJA RESURRECTS AN OLD CLASSIC, AND THERE'S NOT A VOLLEYBALL IN SIGHT

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Team Ninja
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (US: November)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Team Ninja's third Xbox release sees the return of Ryo Hayabusa, who's now in glorious 3D.

Though the job of a games journalist is a rewarding one, we'd gladly trade it all for the chance to become a ninja. Let's face it, throwing shurikens with deadly precision, running up walls and sneaking around to your heart's content is just plain cool. It's little wonder then that so many games feature these silent and deadly assassins. Whether they're in a supporting role in games such as *Metal Gear Solid* or appearing centre stage in titles like *Tenchu* or *Shinobi*, it's not hard to see their appeal. So *Ninja Gaiden* should be right up our alley.

YOU WANT EXTRAS DO YOU?

The *Dead Or Alive* series has always featured plenty of unlockable extras, so it's hardly surprising to find that *Ninja Gaiden* will contain its own selection of hidden treats. Whilst concrete details have not been confirmed, Tomonobu Itagaki (head of Team Ninja) has revealed that he has been playing a lot of the original games, which could mean that at least one of the titles could be found as a playable extra. We're also expecting to see new costumes for Hayabusa. Most intriguingly, it's been reported that not only will *Ninja Gaiden* feature Xbox Live compatibility but that it will also include online elements that have never been seen in an action game before. Unsurprisingly, Itagaki-san is giving nothing away, but if it comes anywhere near the standard of the visuals and gameplay it could turn out to be something very special indeed.

"TEAM NINJA BREATHES FANTASTIC NEW LIFE INTO ONE OF ITS BEST-LOVED SERIES"

Whilst it may share the same name as its 1988 predecessor, the two games couldn't be more different. Like Capcom's *Maximo*, *Ninja Gaiden* is more of a homage than a strict remake and thus gives Team Ninja a great deal of creative freedom in order to produce something that's already looking very impressive.

There are only a few details about *Ninja Gaiden*'s plot, though we do know that it takes place two years before the first Dead Or Alive tournament and features a 14-year-old Ayane (the purple-haired ninja from *Dead Or Alive 2*). Ayane will only be a supporting character (so it's unlikely that she'll be playable), instead the main female focus rests on a girl known only as Rachael. Needless to say, it takes an evil empire and the destruction of his clan (not to mention the theft of his sacred sword) before main man Hayabusa embarks on a quest for bloody revenge.

Though the original *Ninja Gaiden* trilogy might not initially lend itself to a potentially plot-heavy remake, Team Ninja has remembered that the core of the series has always been intense action. As a result, levels throughout *Ninja Gaiden* consist of sprawling environments that range from dark, dusty catacombs to heavily guarded military bases. Hayabusa treats each stage as an interactive playground, allowing him to show off an amazingly athletic array of moves in order to overcome his many opponents. Double jumps, running along walls and a whole host of other acrobatic moves are all in a day's work for the master ninja and Hayabusa manages to pull them all off with breathless ease.

The one aspect of the game that we're most looking forward to is the incredibly frantic combat. Initially armed with his trusty Katana, Hayabusa is a daunting figure as he hacks, slashes and slices his way through a menagerie of disgusting creatures and terrifying bosses. A number of other weapons will become available throughout the game and range from shurikens and bows (complete with seamless first-person interaction), to nunchakus, flaming swords and a healthy dose of ninja magic. All of this hectic action is held together by some of the most impressive visuals seen on the Xbox.

It's clear that updating the *Dead Or Alive 3* engine has resulted in some truly spectacular effects. Hayabusa displays a fluidity and athleticism that hasn't been seen since *Devil May Cry*'s Dante, and every environment has been textured and bump-mapped to perfection. *Gaiden*'s enemies have received just as much care and attention as the master ninja and range from evil ninjas to immense skeletal dragons. The game's most impressive achievement, however, is the free-roaming 3D camera; Team Ninja clearly has great expertise when it comes to fast-moving 3D and *Gaiden*'s camera swoops and pans with aplomb. With a sequel already confirmed, *Ninja Gaiden* is shaping up to be a potential must-have title.

NINJA GAIDEN
XBOX



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Formed in 1991, Team Ninja found fame with its side-scrolling beat-'em-up *Ninja Gaiden* (known as *Shadow Warriors* in Europe). Headed by Tomonobu Itagaki, it's now best known for its *Dead Or Alive* series, which features an array of voluptuous women and devastating counter attacks.

HISTORY

- **DOA XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** 2003 [Xbox]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE** 1998 [PlayStation]
- **SHADOW WARRIORS** 1991 [NES]

■ Missile combat is a welcome alternative from the hectic melee combat – use it wisely.

■ Superb lighting and razor-sharp visuals are just a few of *Ninja Gaiden*'s graphical highlights.

"WITH ITS INCREDIBLE VISUAL EFFECTS AND REALISTIC COMBAT SYSTEM, NINJA GAIDEN WILL TAKE PLAYERS TO A WHOLE NEW DIMENSION"

JOHN INADA, DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, TECMO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S NINJA HEAVEN

SHADOW WARRIORS + DEAD OR ALIVE 3 x SHINOBI = NINJA GAIDEN

BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND



As in the *Metal Gear* series, you can tap on walls to distract enemies.

THE SUN ALWAYS SHINES ON GBA

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

Konami plays its innovation card once more, this time with a GBA adventure that uses sunlight to fight off the undead.

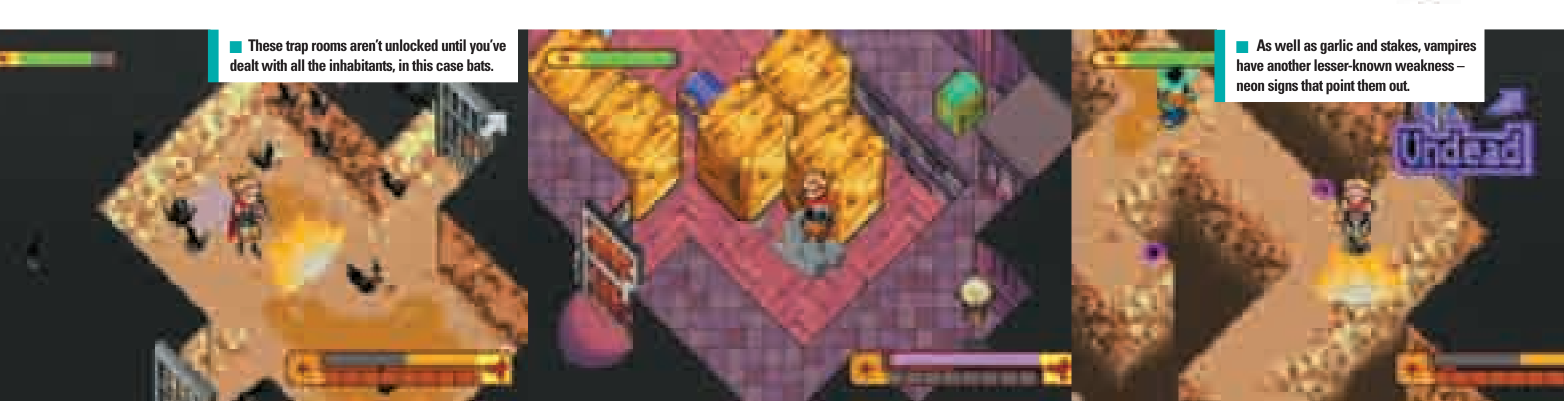
"INNOVATION ASIDE, BOKTAI IS STILL A VERY INTERESTING AND ENJOYABLE ADVENTURE"

For years, gamers have been portrayed as pale-skinned, sun-shy recluses who spend much of their time staring into a screen. Obviously, some of us do fall into this category, but as mobile gaming continues to grow in popularity, gamers the world over can be seen to whip out Game Boys or kick back with phone games absolutely anywhere. In a stroke of genius, Konami is capitalising on this mobility by releasing the first GBA title to have a solar cell built into the cartridge. *Boktai* uses the cell to absorb sunlight to power the guns in a game that's filled with creatures of the night – the sun proves to be a powerful ally against these shady foes.

Even from the early stages of the game, there are plenty of nods to another Konami series – the one that made Solid Snake a household name, no less. Stealth proves as useful a tool as light and the main character has a few moves that make sneaking around much easier. It makes sense to play evasively when the cartridge isn't exposed to light, but even when solar power is on your side certain situations can be tackled better by simply sneaking past them.

The way in which the system works is simple – the more the cartridge is exposed to natural light, the quicker your ammunition recharges. When fully illuminated, you're able to fire to your heart's content, but as soon as you lose your light source you need to start thinking more about conservation.

From what we've seen so far, *Boktai* showcases great style and a good blend of action alongside a unique feature which seems to work really quite well. The RPG-lite system means you'll be able to equip your character as you see fit and the only real concern we have is that of SP compatibility. Where the cartridge was clearly designed with the original GBA in mind, the sensor has more trouble working when sticking towards the player than when facing away. The game itself seems solid enough – there's little like it on the GBA and with the right marketing (the great publicity short shown at E3 got a lot of people talking), *Boktai* should do very well indeed.



These trap rooms aren't unlocked until you've dealt with all the inhabitants, in this case bats.

As well as garlic and stakes, vampires have another lesser-known weakness – neon signs that point them out.


eMag

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

THE MOVIES

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Format:	PC/Xbox/PS2/GameCube
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Lionhead Studios
Release:	TBC '04
Genre:	Life Sim
Players:	1



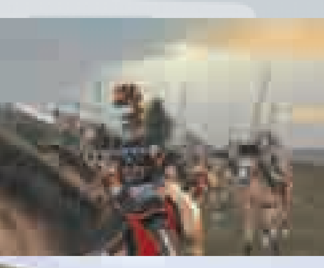
It should come as no surprise to hear that the latest project in the pipeline over at Peter Molyneux's Lionhead Studios looks set to be just about as ambitious and epic as they come. Furnishing players with nothing more than a dirt lot at the dawn of the 20th Century, your goal over the next hundred years or so will be to develop a thriving Hollywood studio. Placing you in control of everything from hand picking your stars to designing the sets, *The Movies* tasks you with creating the box office smashes that will drive your studio forward. You'll be able to download new content and, best of all, post your mini movies online for the whole world to see.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

IT SURE WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY…

Format:	PC
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Creative Assembly
Release:	Q3 '04
Genre:	Strategy
Players:	1 (Multiplayer online)

The *Total War* series is hard to beat for epic battlefield action and, from what we've seen of the awesome *Rome: Total War* thus far, the next instalment promises to eclipse anything the genre has seen before. Immense armies of up to 10,000 motion-captured troops can be led into battle, and huge cities (complete with citizens) may be constructed as your empire expands. When a conflict erupts around these towns, the city streets will be meticulously recreated in all their glory to host the action. It might not be scheduled for release until the end of next year, but the brief demonstrations of its stunning 3D visuals have already sent enough pulses racing to put the hype machine in motion.

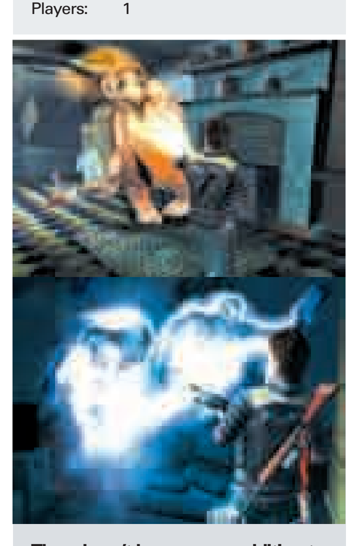




GHOSTHUNTER

WE AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOST

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	In-House
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	Survival Horror
Players:	1



There hasn't been a new addition to the survival horror genre for at least a couple of weeks now, but budding Egon Spenglers should fear not as Sony is promising to have its very own scarefest – *Ghosthunter* – on the shelves before the year is out. Based on an enhanced version of the *Primal* engine, the latest offering from Studio Cambridge is hoping to present a serious challenge to the abundance of superb Japanese horror titles. Although there's a distinct lack of in-game screenshots to back up the sublime quality of the renders that have been released, we're expecting to see the PS2's graphical capabilities pushed to the limit in bringing the legions of disturbing nasties to 'life'.

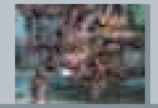
SWAT: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM

LOOK MA – NO HANDS

Format:	PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Vivendi Universal
Developer:	Argonaut Games
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	FPS
Players:	1-2

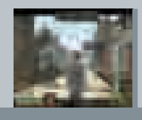
Whether we're watching the footy or participating in some Uri Geller experiment, television is a one-way medium and we can't influence events no matter how loudly we shout at the screen. Until now, that is. A nifty piece of voice recognition software has been built into the control interface of this team-based shooter that lets you use the microphone headset to bark orders to your AI squad-mates. There's also the ability to vocally apprehend suspects while your team cuffs them. We've had some 'interesting' experiences with VR software in the past, and only hope the interface is suitably accent-proof to avoid discrepancies between what you say and what the AI hears.





DELAYED – CASTLEVANIA (PS2)

■ As if to enhance our concerns that *Castlevania: Lament Of Innocence* is going to be a disappointment, Konami has ordered the game to be delayed until January '04 in Japan, with a PAL release set for February.



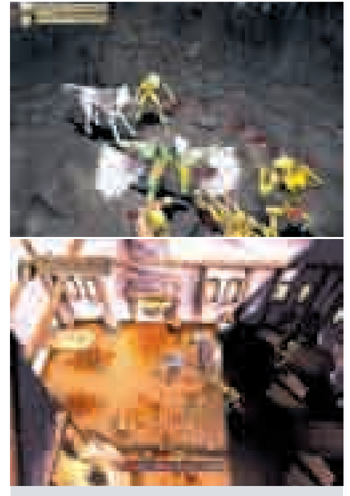
UNCANNED – RED DEAD REVOLVER (PS2)

■ Now here's a turn-up for the books – having disappeared without trace last month, rumour has it that this western shoot-'em-up is back on the cards (albeit minus Capcom's backing). Is Rockstar behind it all? We'll wait and see.

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

THEY'VE ADDED A 'II' AND MORE BESIDES

Format:	PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Vivendi Universal/Interplay
Developer:	Black Isle Studios
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	Action RPG
Players:	1-2



Extending the *Baldur's Gate* series beyond its traditional PC home proved to be an incredibly lucrative exercise, selling more than a million units on PS2, Xbox and GameCube. Now Interplay's RPG division, Black Isle Studios, has taken over development for the hotly anticipated console follow-up and thrown in a generous helping of new content. As far as the visuals and gameplay are concerned, Black Isle seems to have adopted the 'if it ain't broke' approach and stuck to the winning formula of *Dark Alliance*. Players can expect to see a couple more playable characters and tons of new locations, but otherwise it looks like business as usual for adventure fans.

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

SMELLS LIKE VICTORY?

Format:	PC
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	EA
Developer:	Digital Illusions
Release:	Q2 '04
Genre:	FPS
Players:	1 (up to 64 online)

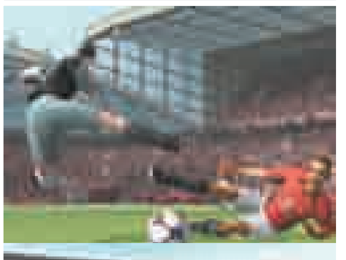
With the latest *Secret Weapons Of World War II* expansion pack out now, EA has already turned its attentions to touting the long-awaited full sequel to the superb PC war sim *Battlefield 1942*. Though development is still in its early stages, *Battlefield Vietnam* is already shaping up to surpass its predecessor in every way. Moving its all-action portrayal of war into the Vietnamese theatre of conflict, players can use a range of new weaponry and vehicles. Varied terrain maps, a stunning new graphics engine and an authentic Sixties soundtrack should create a truly cinematic experience, while the multiplayer online battles look set to take centre stage.



CLUB FOOTBALL

THIS SEASON'S SURPRISE PACKAGE

Format:	PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Codemasters
Developer:	In-House
Release:	Q3 '03
Genre:	Sports
Players:	1-4





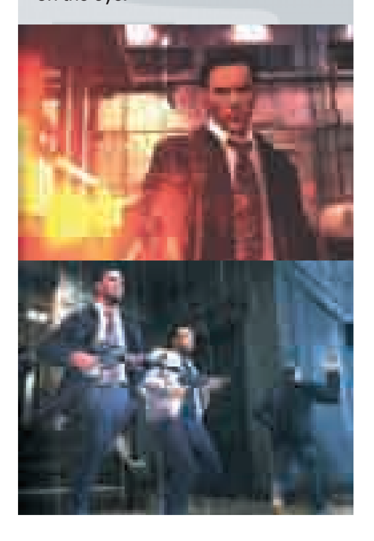
New football titles come along all the time but tend to fade from memory rather quickly as we return to *Pro Evolution*'s unbeatable gameplay or the ever-popular *FIFA* franchise. The latest challenge to the league leaders comes in the shape of *Club Football*, with 17 separate versions dedicated to the fans of certain clubs. The featured English Premiership teams are Arsenal, Villa, Chelsea, Man Utd, Liverpool and Leeds, but if your loyalties lie outside this selection you're unlikely to appreciate the host of club-specific features intended to set this title apart from the crowd. That said, if the gameplay is anything like the visuals, Codemasters could have a serious contender on its hands.

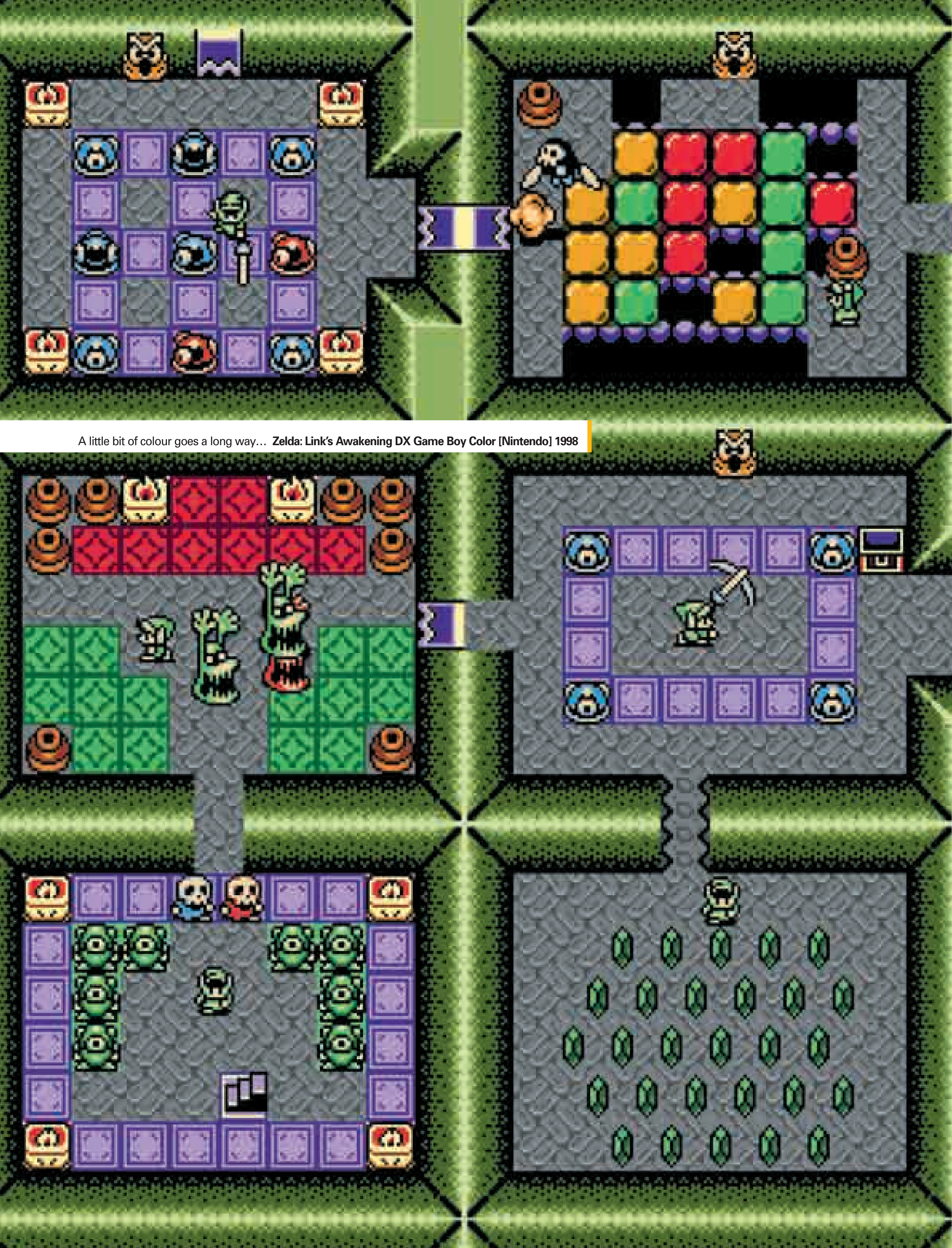
MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

WELCOME BACK TO A WORLD OF PAYNE…

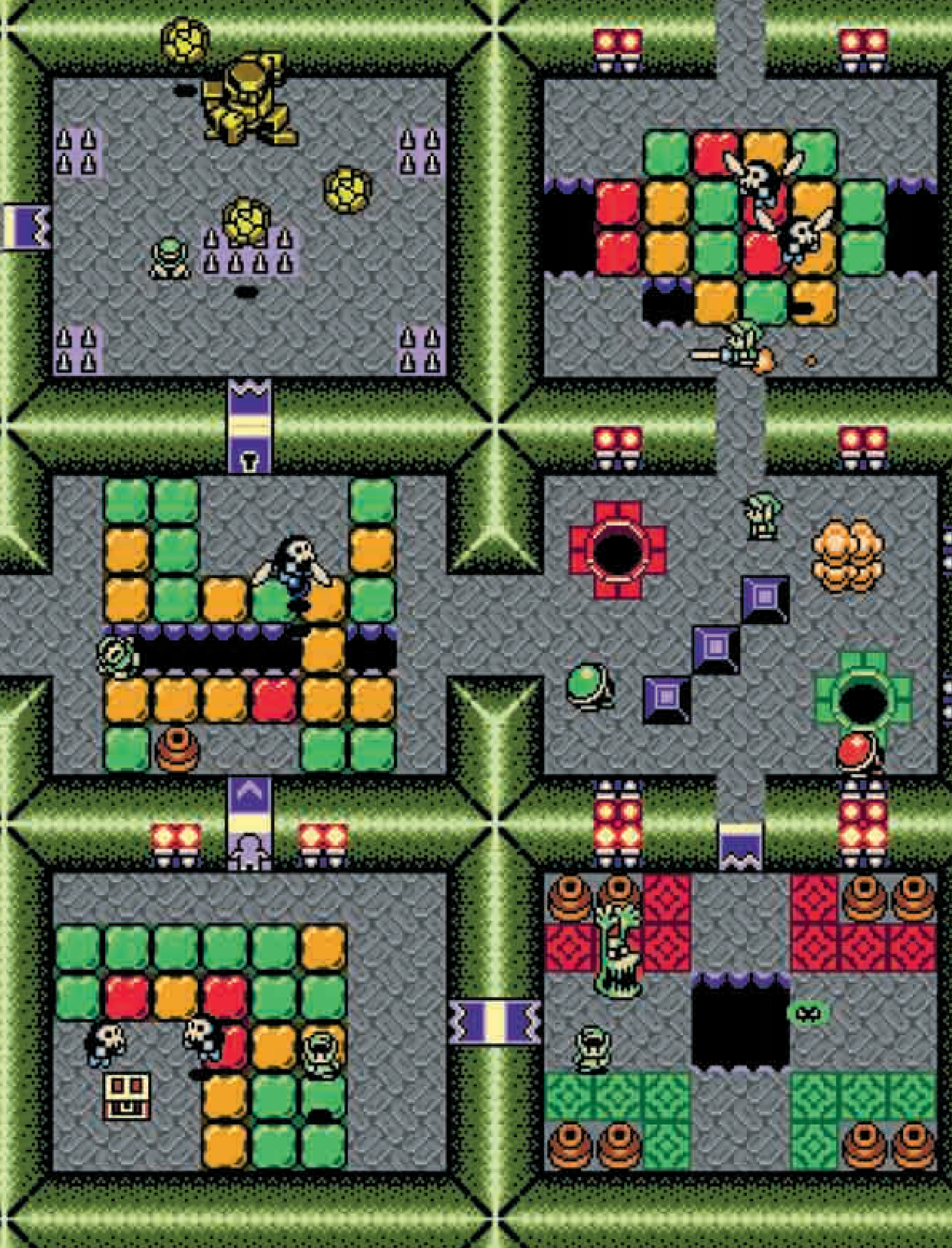
Format:	PC/Xbox/PlayStation2
Origin:	Finland
Publisher:	Rockstar
Developer:	Remedy
Release:	Q1 '04
Genre:	Action
Players:	1

Max Payne wrote his name in videogame history back in 2001 by introducing us to the cinematic joys of bullet-time. Since then, countless games have followed in his footsteps and incorporated a similar slow-mo effect to give the action a dramatic edge. But now that his party trick has become a little old hat, will the man with nothing to lose have enough up his sleeve to enjoy the same level of success again? Rockstar is keeping its cards close to its chest in terms of details but major enhancements to the graphics engine, bullet-time effects and inclusion of a Havok 2 physics system will ensure Max Payne's second outing is very easy on the eye.





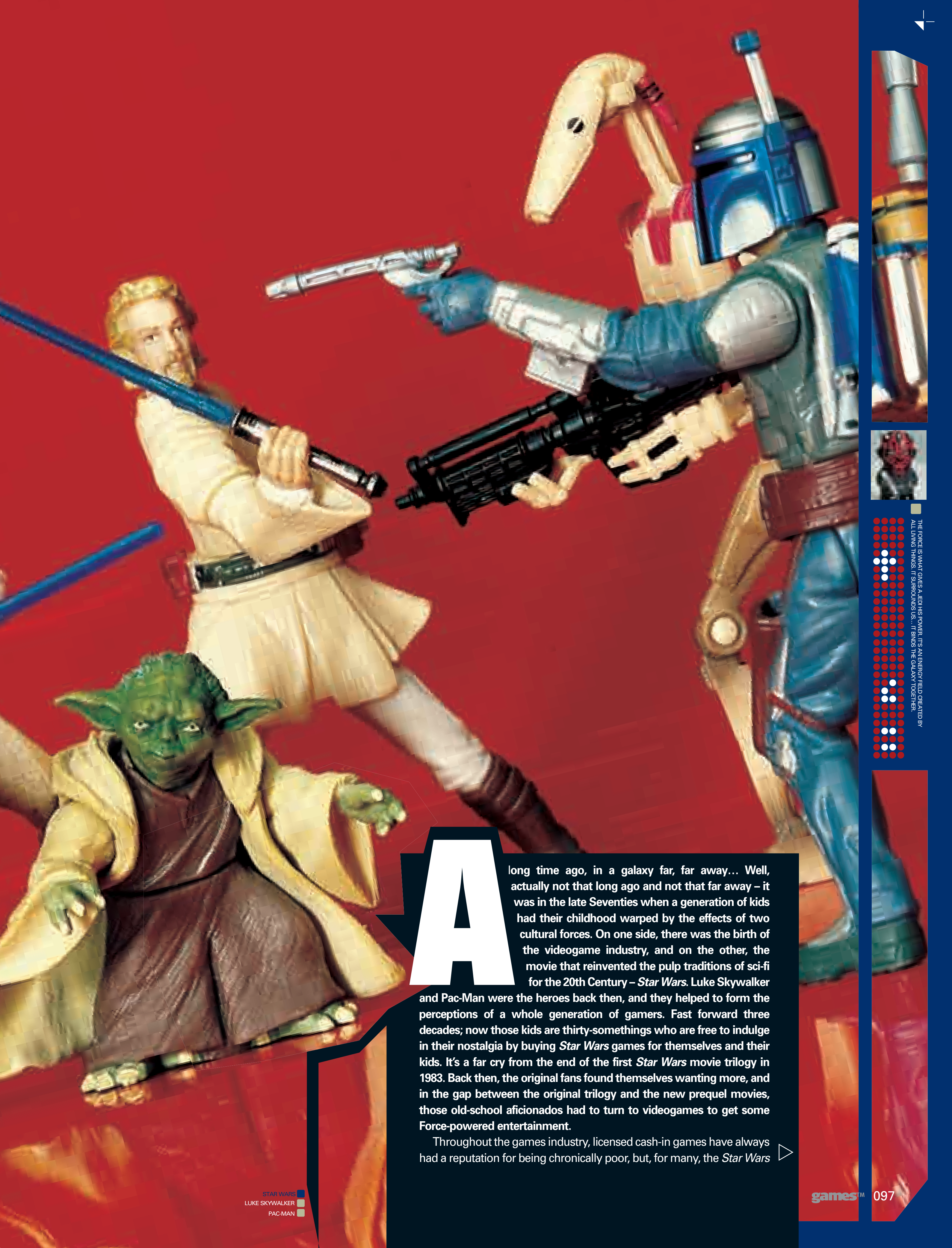
A little bit of colour goes a long way… **Zelda: Link's Awakening DX Game Boy Color [Nintendo] 1998**



FORCE FEEDBACK

STAR WARS USED TO BE ALL ABOUT THE FILMS, BUT ARE THE FANS DITCHING THE CINEMA IN FAVOUR OF THEIR CONSOLES?





A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away… Well, actually not that long ago and not that far away – it was in the late Seventies when a generation of kids had their childhood warped by the effects of two cultural forces. On one side, there was the birth of the videogame industry, and on the other, the movie that reinvented the pulp traditions of sci-fi for the 20th Century – *Star Wars*. Luke Skywalker and Pac-Man were the heroes back then, and they helped to form the perceptions of a whole generation of gamers. Fast forward three decades; now those kids are thirty-somethings who are free to indulge in their nostalgia by buying *Star Wars* games for themselves and their kids. It's a far cry from the end of the first *Star Wars* movie trilogy in 1983. Back then, the original fans found themselves wanting more, and in the gap between the original trilogy and the new prequel movies, those old-school aficionados had to turn to videogames to get some Force-powered entertainment.

Throughout the games industry, licensed cash-in games have always had a reputation for being chronically poor, but, for many, the *Star Wars*



titles from LucasArts were the exception to that rule. In the last decade, *Star Wars* games went from crappy platformers and side-scrolling shooters to fully-fledged epics of their own, creating new characters and storylines that expanded upon the films; but that brief period of creativity looked set to end when the prequel movies arrived. The evolution of the movie and videogames industries took place side by side, with technology and narrative from one bleeding into the other, and *Star Wars* reflected this. Some movie critics were quick to point out the similarity between scenes in the prequels

"THE GAMES CAN BE JUST AS FULFILLING AS THE FILMS IF THEY ARE DONE RIGHT – A GREAT STORY CAN IMMERSE YOU IN EVENTS"

SIMON VINCENT / MOD MAKER

OBI-WAN HAS TAUGHT YOU WELL. YOU HAVE CONTROLLED YOUR FEAR. NOW, RELEASE YOUR ANGER! ONLY YOUR HATRED CAN DESTROY ME!

FARCE FEEDBACK

One thing *Star Wars* titles have done is carefully comb the gaming genres for title ideas; the obvious stuff like FPS shooters, RTSs, fight games and space sims have all been done, and thanks to the podrace in *Phantom Menace* we've had racers as well. So how long is it before LucasArts starts branching out into other styles of gaming? How about *Sim Death Star* – start out as a lowly Imperial Moff and build your own planet-killing superlaser! Vaporise innocent planets for your own amusement!

Surely with Jabba the Hutt's band in *Return Of The Jedi* and that catchy Ewok song, can a music-based *Star Wars* title be far away? *Jedi Set Radio* and *Dance Dance Rebellion*, anyone? Maybe *Grand Theft Jawa*, a Mos Eisley-based crime sim where you play a cheeky little fella stealing Landspeeders and nicking droids… Hey, it'll happen. You mark our words.

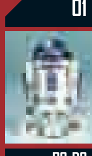
and games. Many saw scenes like *The Phantom Menace*'s podrace as little more than a glorified advert for the videogame, a point not lost on Andy McDermott, editor of movie magazine *Hotdog*. "It's ironic that the original films inspired so many videogames, and now the new films are like videogames," he says. "The quality of acting on show in the prequels is certainly no better than, say, *Resident Evil 2*."

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Aimed squarely at a new audience, the *Star Wars* prequels left older fans cold. "People who grew up with the original films were, for the most part, disappointed by the prequels," says McDermott, "Especially *Episode I* because it seemed so completely detached from the stories they loved as kids." Dissatisfied, many of the generation that grew up with *Star Wars* turned once again to the games to get their fix of the Force. After all, as Simon Vincent, editor of *Star Wars* game mod website The X-Wing Outpost (www.antilles100.freeserve.co.uk), points out, the games are "a way of getting yourself stuck into the movies. You can actually be a Jedi and swing a Lightsaber, fly an X-Wing or even be Han Solo or Luke Skywalker."

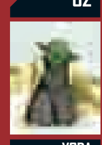
As a whole group of youngsters latch on to a new age of *Star Wars* films, their older counterparts are carving out their own slice of the saga through original spin-off games. However, McDermott is sceptical that the games will be as widely popular as the films. "I think that only a truly fanatical hard-core fan who eats and sleeps *Star Wars* could like many of the games," he says. "LucasArts used to be a seal of quality on a game, but it's become totally devalued by so many third-rate titles." LucasArts does seem to have realised this and is aiming for a "return to superlative quality", in the words of company president Simon Jeffery. "It's still a bumpy road, and unfortunately we are upsetting a few people along the way," he noted in an interview. "However, we truly believe that in a couple of years, all LucasArts and *Star Wars* gaming fans will look back and say, 'Ah, it was really worth it'." The fans have yet to decide if they agree, but they'll soon be offered the chance to be part of a living, breathing *Star Wars* world when *Star Wars Galaxies* opens its doors. This, believes McDermott, is what could really

01



R2-D2

02



YODA

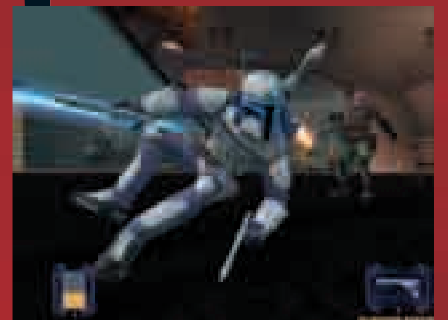
redeem the *Star Wars* games. "Something like *Star Wars Galaxies* would have a lot of appeal because the *Star Wars* universe is something that's set and familiar to all, rather than a more generic fantasy backdrop like *EverQuest*," he says.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

In the earliest years, the tie-ins operated in the shadows of the films, allowing gamers to replay key scenes but not to go further afield. It was not until ten years after *Return Of The Jedi* that the first games to push the envelope – *X-Wing* and *Rebel Assault* – appeared. Between 1993 and 1996, 23 *Star Wars* titles were released for various platforms, and Lucasfilm saw the potential to further the franchise without calling George back to direct another movie. This move did prove popular with some fans, though many are aware that there's an element of cynicism involved. "Games are used in an off-movie year to keep *Star Wars* promoted," says Simon Vincent, "but the games can be just as fulfilling as the films if they are done right – they carry on the fun and adventure when there isn't a movie out. A great storyline can immerse you in the events and feel like the films. When LucasArts go the extra mile, as they did with the *Jedi Knight* FMV, you even get a mini-movie with actors." One example of this 'extra mile' was 1994's *Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire*. It was the first *Star Wars* project to feature all-new footage filmed with actors and sets since the original movies, but the game performed badly and all that hard work got lost. At the same time, the *Star Wars* saga was enjoying a rebirth in novels and comics, and from this cross-media melange an idea was born called *Shadows Of The Empire*. The concept behind *Shadows* was for a *Star Wars* movie without the movie – the game (a flagship title for the N64 console) was the lynch-pin of a storyline set between the second and third films, spinning off a novelisation, comics, trading cards and even a soundtrack album. But while the success of the project was limited (Simon Vincent ▷



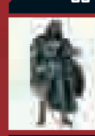
Let's face it – although most of us love the *Star Wars* saga, there have been a few mis-steps along the way and, like the introduction of Jar-Jar Binks, some *Star Wars* games should never have been unleashed. For ages, the game that many fans reviled was *Rebel Assault*. A glitchy arcade-style title mixing third-person shooter sections with on-rails space combat, *Rebel Assault* was an early experiment down the technological dead-end of CD-I. A decade later, it has aged badly while its purely PC-engineered stable-mate *X-Wing* still has play value. Despite the poor performance of the title, a sequel came out in 1995, but it was blown away by the success of the first *Star Wars* FPS, *Dark Forces*. *Masters Of Teras Kasi* proved that *Mortal Kombat* crossed with *Star Wars* was a bit of a non-starter, especially when all players really wanted was a chance to cut each other up with Lightsabers – they would get it three years later with *Jedi Power Battles*, but by then the *Jedi Knight* games had eclipsed the beat-em-up titles for sheer Force-powered mayhem. As the prequel trilogy began in cinemas, some *Star Wars* gamers began to fear that the heyday of the saga was over, with thinly-veiled tie-in titles that only paid lip service to the *Star Wars* milieu (the *Vigilante 8* clone *Demolition*, a flawed third-person adaptation of *The Phantom Menace* and the slack *Force Commander* RTS – as Andy McDermott says, the secret of a good *Star Wars* game is "being a good game in its own right if all the *Star Wars* elements are removed"). But with the advent of online multiplayer games set for release in the coming months, the LucasArts series may be approaching a true renaissance. Poodoo or not? We'll have to wait and see.

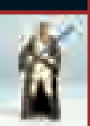


BANTHA POODOO

STAR WARS TIMELINE

1977 *Star Wars* (movie)
1980 *The Empire Strikes Back* (movie)
1982 *The Empire Strikes Back* (Atari 2600, Intellivision)
1983 *Return Of The Jedi* (movie); *Star Wars* (Arcade, Atari 2600/XE, C64, Colecovision); *Return Of The Jedi: Death Star Battle* (Atari 2600/5200/XE); *Jedi Arena* (Atari 2600)
1984 *Return Of The Jedi* (Arcade)
1985 *The Empire Strikes Back* (Arcade)
1987 *Star Wars* (PC)
1991 *Star Wars* (NES, Game Boy, Game Gear, Master System)
1992 *Super Star Wars* (SNES); *The Empire Strikes Back* (NES, Game Boy, Game Gear)
1993 *Super The Empire Strikes Back* (SNES); *Rebel Assault* (PC, SEGA CD, CD-I, 3DO); *Star Wars Chess* (PC, 3DO); *X-Wing, Imperial Pursuit* and *B-Wing* expansion packs (PC)
1994 *Super Return Of The Jedi* (SNES); *Rebel Assault* (Mac); *TIE Fighter* and *Defender Of The Empire* expansion packs (PC)
1995 *Star Wars Arcade* (Arcade, Sega 32X); *Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire* (PC, Mac); *Dark Forces* (PC, Mac); *Super Return Of The Jedi* (GB)
1996 *Shadows Of The Empire* (N64); *Dark Forces* (PSone); *Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire* (PSone); *X-Wing* (Mac)
1997 *Star Wars Trilogy: Special Editions* (movies); *X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter* & *Balance Of Power* expansion pack (PC); *TIE Fighter* (Mac); *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* (PC); *Star Wars Monopoly* (PC); *Shadows Of The Empire* (PC); *Masters Of Teras Kasi* (PSone); *Yoda Stories* (PC, GBC)
1998 *Jedi Knight: Mysteries Of The Sith* expansion pack (PC); *Star Wars Supremacy* (PC); *Rogue Squadron* (PC, N64); *Star Wars Trilogy* (Arcade)
1999 *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (movie); *The Phantom Menace* (PC, PSone); *X-Wing Alliance* (PC); *Episode 1: Racer* (PC, N64), *Star Wars Jeopardy* (PC).
2000 *Force Commander* (PC); *Demolition* (PSone, DC); *Jedi Power Battles* (PSone, DC); *Episode I: Racer* (GBC, Mac, DC); *Battle For Naboo* (N64), *Obi-Wan's Adventures* (GBC)
2001 *Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* (GC); *Battle For Naboo* (PC); *Galactic Battlegrounds* (PC); *Obi-Wan* (XB); *Starfighter* (PS2); *Starfighter: Special Edition* (XB); *Super Bombad Racing* (PS2); *Episode I: Racer* (Arcade)
2002 *Episode II: Attack Of The Clones* (movie); *Starfighter* (PC); *Galactic Battlegrounds: Clone Campaigns* expansion pack (PC); *Racer Revenge* (XB), *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* (PC, XB, GC); *Jedi Starfighter* (PS2); *The Clone Wars* (PS2, GC); *Bounty Hunter* (PS2, GC); *Attack Of The Clones* (GBA); *The New Droid Army* (GBA)
2003 *The Clone Wars* (XB); *Star Wars Galaxies* (PC); *Knights Of The Old Republic* (XB, PC); *Rogue Squadron: Rebel Strike* (GC),*Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (PC); *Flight Of The Falcon* (GBA)

03

DARTH VADER

04

OBI-WAN

blames poor controls for making the game frustrating), it did the job by keeping fans occupied until the Special Edition versions of the original films were released in 1997. LucasArts capitalised on the surge in interest for the old movies, releasing *Jedi Knight* and *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*. These first-person shooter and space sim titles remain the star intellectual properties of *Star Wars* gaming, with 1999's *X-Wing Alliance* still well respected and a new *Jedi Knight* instalment on the way.

THE NEXT GENERATION

But once *The Phantom Menace* arrived, *Star Wars* games began to lean towards a younger market, with more simplistic gameplay styles, storylines with less depth and what some observers saw as a certain lack of originality – the "cartoon-style look" is also cited by Vincent as another problem with the title. Arcade-style games like *Battle For Naboo* and *Jedi Power Battles* followed *Galactic Battlegrounds* (a *Star Wars* re-spray of *Age Of Empires*), but many gamers stuck to the older titles. Of the 15 games released in 2001-2002, less than a third were based on the original trilogy, and where *Star Wars* games were once largely dominated by the older-age-group PC market, the state of play is now securely in the more lucrative but youthful console sector – and attracting younger players means aiming more towards the prequel trilogy. Vincent believes that the PC gamers and, to some extent, the original trilogy, are being overlooked. "All the new stuff is coming out on console only and that is really annoying," he says. "The last good games to come out [on PC] were *Jedi Outcast* and *Battleground*, whereas the consoles have had at least three or four new games that haven't been converted, even poorly. Fans have wanted a new *X-Wing* game for three years but all they make is GameCube *Rogue Squadron* ones." However, Tom Sarris, head of PR at LucasArts, maintains that the company has not ruled out the possibility of future development of original trilogy games "since there remain many compelling stories to be told within that universe." Though he also notes "for the time being, we're focusing our *Star Wars* game development efforts on [the prequels]."

> "I THINK ONLY A TRULY FANATICAL HARD-CORE STAR WARS FAN COULD LIKE MANY OF THE GAMES"
>
> ANDY MCDERMOTT / HOTDOG MAGAZINE

IS THERE A NEW HOPE?

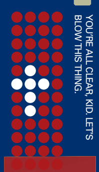
Star Wars fans are a dedicated lot, so their disappointment with the prequels sent many of them running back to their own cadres of mod makers. Strong online groups creating missions and levels for *X-Wing* and *Jedi Knight* were more than happy to take up the slack, maintaining a healthy player community. Sites like X-wing Legacy, XWA Upgrade and the fan designers of the X-ED mission editor have kept the space combat game alive in the face of newer sim games that can't match the depth of this venerable original, while hundreds of *Jedi Knight* sites continue to thrive. In fact, Simon Vincent thinks that it's the enthusiasm of the mod makers that's keeping the *Star Wars* PC gaming scene alive. "The PC market [for *Star Wars* games] is very limited, so mods are needed to keep those few PC games playable. Without new games or expansions the mods are the only thing that keeps the *Star Wars* games popular."

However, LucasArts' policy of at best ignoring mod sites and at worst shutting them down made some fans feel even more embattled; many feared that *Star Wars* games were in danger of becoming shallow, short-attention-span titles and some fans were still convinced the original trilogy would be forgotten. Simon Jeffery sees the ebb and flow of games between PC and console as part of the growth in technology: "We will be more active in the console field as we get better at building console games," he says. "However, we strongly believe in the future of PC gaming, and will continue to invest in and build games for this market. The PC is constantly evolving – the current consoles are red-hot in terms of technology right now, but in two to three years the PC will be where high performance lies, and console gamers will all be reading about the 'next-next-gen' systems just around the corner."

With just one more prequel movie to come, the future of *Star Wars* gaming is still undecided. Market forces mean that there's no doubt the prequels will continue to be the leading premise for *Star Wars* titles, but the concerns of old-school gamers that this will be at the expense of the original trilogy seem to be premature. "We are going to have online gaming and that will keep *Star Wars* evolving on its own," says Jeffery, "We are looking at new areas of *Star Wars* gaming, such as *Knights Of The Old Republic* set several thousand years before the movies. It allows us to do stuff with *Star Wars* that we have never done before. We are looking to move away from just the game of the movie and really flesh out the universe and expand it as much as we can."

So where does the future lie for the *Star Wars* saga and its fans? Rather than divide their fanbase into original trilogy and prequel fans, LucasArts seems to want to bring them together, and the advent of *Star Wars Galaxies* and *Knights Of The Old Republic* is set to build communities of gamers. Beyond these titles, *Rebel Strike*, *Jedi Academy* and *Republic Commando* will appeal to *Star Wars* fans both young and old. In just over a year's time, *Episode III* will arrive in cinemas and another phase in the *Star Wars* saga will be over. From there, the galaxy far, far away will once more become the property of gamers to build on as they see fit.





YOU'RE ALL CLEAR, KID. LETS BLOW THIS THING.



HEY, Y'KNOW, FOR KIDS!

As well as a slew of *Star Wars* games, LucasArts has also used the franchise for several PC-based 'edutainment' titles for children. The earliest in the series was *Droid Works*, which used the *Jedi Knight* FPS engine to teach the ankle-biters about basic physics and mechanics – stuff like pulleys, levers and the like. The game allowed you to build your own robot, Jawa-style, from a set of parts in order to overcome obstacles. With the arrival of the kid-friendly *Episode I* movie in 1999 came *The Gungan Frontier*, a junior cross between an RTS and *Sim City*, but the majority of the later children's games were aimed at a much younger age group with stuff like *Pit Droids*, *Star Wars Maths*, *Yoda's Challenge* and *Anakin's Speedway*. Sadly, the high Jar-Jar content of these titles kept them well away from the more discerning *Star Wars* geeks.

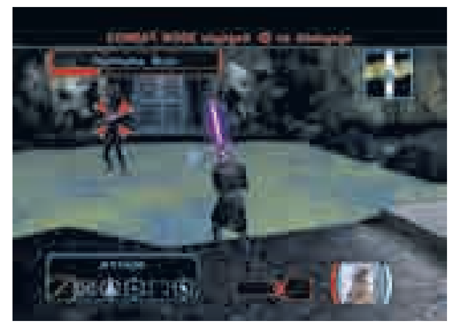

BIRDIE
Challenge
FINISH



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below seven (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



When characters level up you'll often get to add new skills and abilities.



The gates of Anchorhead. No doubt you'll find some power convertors inside. And some charming exotic dancers.





FINGERPRINT

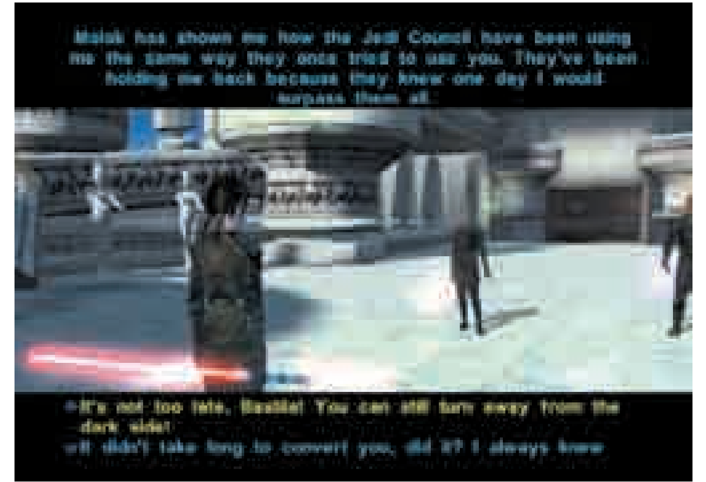
games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

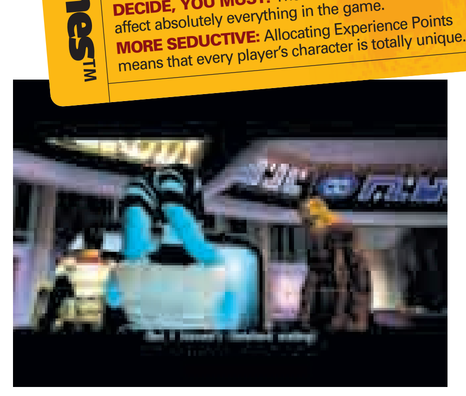
DECIDE, YOU MUST: The choices you make affect absolutely everything in the game.

MORE SEDUCTIVE: Allocating Experience Points means that every player's character is totally unique.

As soon as you encounter an enemy you can choose to engage in battle or, ahem, run away.



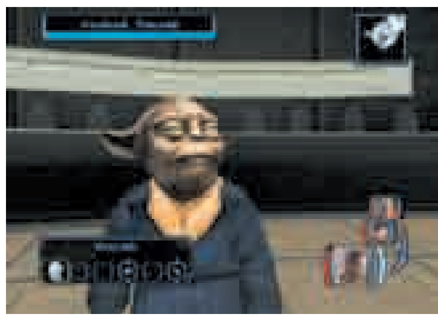
Much like the films, the battle between good and evil is at the centre of the game. Which way will you go…?



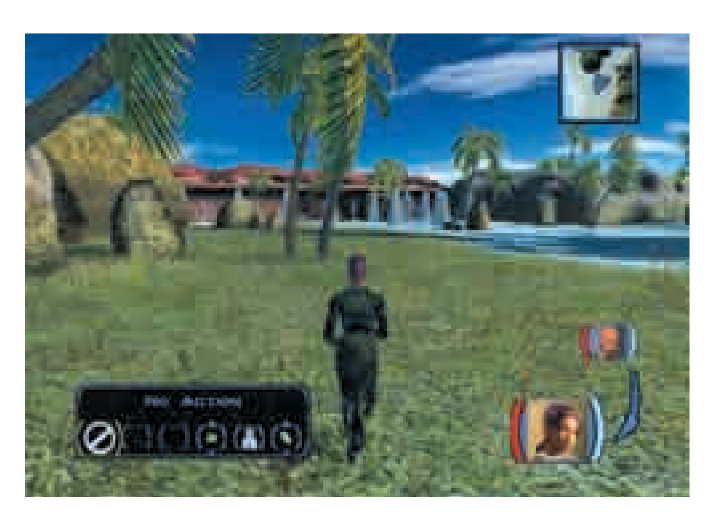
Nearly every NPC will offer up a phrase or two of recorded dialogue – most can hold full conversations with you.



Perform a bad deed and you'll score Dark Side points. Help an old lady across the street, however, and you'll score for the Light Side.

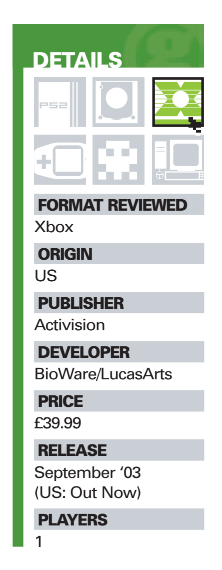


There are plenty of familiar faces, but chances are they're just the same race as the film characters, rather than yer actual Yoda or Chewie.




CAN BIOWARE SUCCEED WHERE SO MANY HAVE FAILED BEFORE?

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
BioWare/LucasArts

PRICE
£39.99

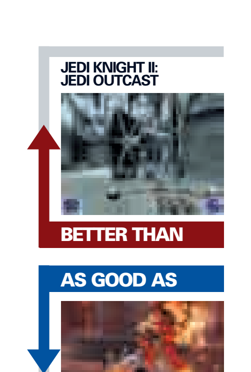
RELEASE
September '03
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

It has become something of a cliché in videogames circles to say that recent *Star Wars* games have failed to capture the heady days of the *X-Wing* series on PC. Admittedly, there have been a few exceptions to the rule – the GameCube's *Rogue Leader* and (soon to be a classed as an online gaming phenomenon) *Star Wars Galaxies* on PC are prime examples – but what makes these two succeed where others have so miserably failed? Perhaps it's that they were both developed out-of-house and LucasArts' input was minimal. Perhaps it's simply that they do what *Star Wars* games used to do: they make you feel like you're part of George Lucas' (and his considerably talented workforce's) fantasy universe. You are Luke Skywalker, you are flying down the Death Star's exhaust trench, you are all clear, kid, now let's blow this thing and go home… And it's this that makes *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* so, so good – you get to play the role you always fantasised about as a child, by starring in your own *Star Wars* movie.

By following similar themes to those found in the movies (redemption and the temptation of evil) and by setting the story 4,000 years before the events depicted in the movies, *Knights* succeeds in evoking the films without simply plagiarising Lucas' stories and characters. The game also follows the artistic rules of the films with planets having distinctively different feels and colour palettes – the Jedi training camp is located on a suitably autumnal and Oriental Dantooine, while the water world of Manaan is all deep blues and silver and is reminiscent of Kamino, the clone production planet in *Attack Of The Clones*. *Knights* invents rather than copies; it merely hints at, rather than screams, *Star Wars*. Sure, it relies on certain *Star Wars* game traditions (you do get to visit Tatooine, after all) but doesn't need them to make you believe you're in the *Star Wars* universe. Although obviously, it appears to be a recurring theme that the desert planet is highly significant in the fate of the galaxy…

In fact, just a quick note on the whole 4,000 years business. It seems that the *Star Wars* universe is a largely timeless place, with the battle between Sith and Jedi a constant, but BioWare has taken quite a few liberties with *Star Wars*, liberties that may grate with some fans. *Knights* features



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS



Not only do most characters have plenty of dialogue, but they lip-synch in their own language. Not that you can see this guy's lips, of course.



LIVE OR DIE?

The combat in *Knights* is Dungeons & Dragons only with accelerated dice throwing. Attacks, defence and specials are successful (or not) depending your character's stats and on the roll of a die. It sounds pretty geeky, but BioWare has managed to implement it so well that it works like the fighting really is in real time. Because things can get complicated, you can pause the action at any time and 'stack' moves for your fighters. We know that it's brilliant because you can tailor the fighting in any way you like so, if you like, you can have the action pause after every throw of the die just like in *Final Fantasy*.

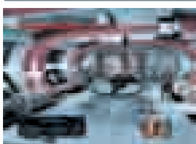


24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO REACH THEM

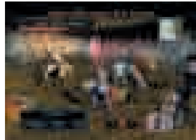


00:05 MINUTES



Thrown in at the deep end, you don't know who you are or how you got where you are. No time to think, and there's a Sith attack to escape – time to learn the basics.

03:00 HOURS



You've played through the game's opening act and you've just enrolled in the Jedi Academy on Dantooine, but there's definitely something not quite right about it…

2 DAYS



You're well on your way to becoming a Jedi Master – or Dark Lord of the Sith. It's around this point that your Jedi powers become interesting… very interesting.



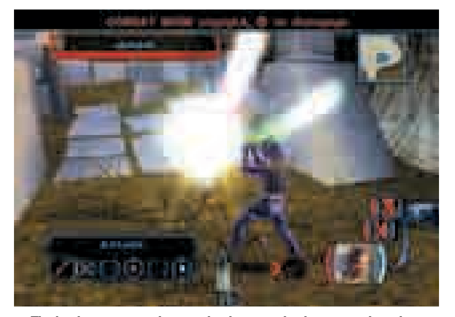
As well as your main quest, there are a few mini-games to stumble across, including Pazaak (a card game where you can win money) and Gunner, which lets you take a ride in the Ebon Hawk and shoot down enemy ships.

technology which is far in advance of anything Lucas has in the films: stealth belts that render the wearer invisible, brain implants that enhance the user's battle abilities and a metal that is Lightsaber-resistant are just a few examples (the latter of which is oddly used to make blades, but not armour). We know why they've done it – largely to shoehorn the BioWare PC RPG into a *Star Wars* universe and afford you more customisable characters. For us, suspending disbelief was fairly easy given all the Wookiees, Lightsabers and Jedi running around, but for anyone who loathes the new movies, it may be a liberty too far.

Still, at least you can't fault the battles. BioWare has managed to make turn-based fighting seem like real time. The fighting system is based on the d20 system but you'd never know it. Hidden 20-sided dice rolls determine the outcome of every attack, defence, Force Power and so on. It's far too complicated to go into any detail here without using up the rest of the space in this review, but you should take our word that it works brilliantly. The beauty is that it remains a fluid process which in turn enables drama and excitement. Oh, and one other thing – the battle animations are so good that when you get a couple of Jedi up against one another, it really is like watching a Lightsaber duel.

Dialogue also evokes Lucas' films – "I'm Shana Denis, I'm here to rescue you," and the ubiquitous, "I have a bad feeling about this," correspond to Lucas' idea that the *Star Wars* universe contains rhyming couplets. Pretentious or not, *Knights* does follow that rule to the letter. Indeed, the use of dialogue is just another area where *Knights* excels. There are some 10,000 lines of spoken (yes, spoken) dialogue and it shows.

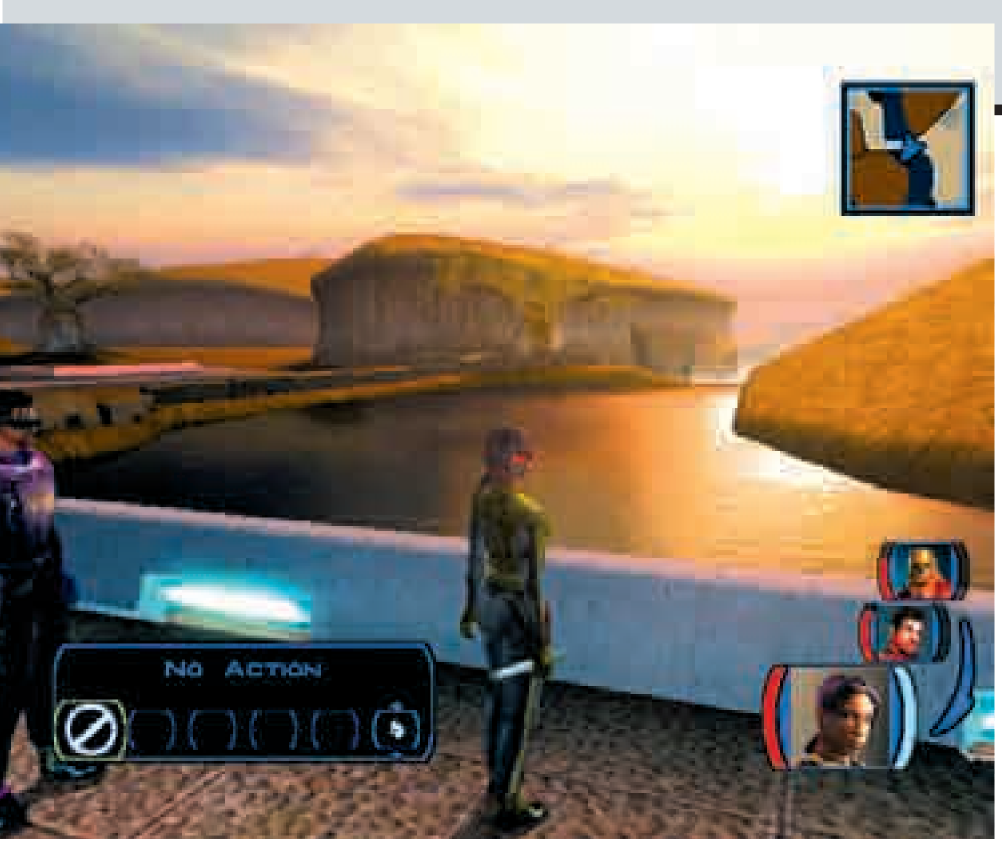
"THERE'S A CONSTANT TUGGING BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, NEATLY REPRESENTED BY A SCALE AND BY THE WAY YOUR CHARACTER LOOKS"



The battle system can be completely customised – you can have it turn-based or real time, or every stage in between.



You can control any of the members of your party although conversations and decisions only affect the central characters.



Almost every NPC will offer up at least a single remark – most can be engaged in conversation, while major characters can be conversed with for five or ten minutes at a time. This is just another reason why *Knights* conveys the feeling of being right in the middle of a living, breathing world. There are times when there is almost too much talking and not enough action but, as with much in *Knights*, the choice of whether you sit through it all is entirely yours.

And this is the best part of *Knights*. It's a game that gives the choice to the player. You always feel that it's you, rather than the game's designers, who makes the decisions of where to go, what to say, how to deal with situations, which path to take. Even better, all your decisions invariably have repercussions, and these can can radically change the game's balance. Everything you say and do will affect how the NPCs react to you, or even how an entire planet will treat you. Even if you play for the Republic or the Sith. That's right – it's your choices that determine if you're a good Jedi or a Dark one.

It's all elegantly done too – choose to steal a widower's last opportunity for a meal then you'll score Dark Side points; help her by buying a hunting trophy from her for an inflated price and you'll score for the Light Side. There's a constant tugging between good and evil, neatly represented by a scale and by the way your character looks. Go for the good guys and you'll look healthy, start down the dark path and pale skin, red eyes and bulging veins will be your friends. This has a bearing on almost every aspect of the game – from how the story pans out to how you're perceived in the game (hit the top of the dark scale, for instance, and it's possible that people will simply flee rather than risk speaking to you) and it even goes as far as which objects and powers you can use.

Of course, compared to a Japanese RPG such as, say, *The Wind Waker*, *Knights* is a very different beast. Without any kind of strict structure to hold it all in, it's a very open-ended affair. After the game's opening act, you're pretty much left up to your own devices and can travel freely around the galaxy without the need for a new ability or object. And like many of BioWare's previous RPGs, you can choose to go for the main plot or take your time playing through the numerous side quests, all of which only serve to make the game a much richer experience.

Obviously, we could pick holes in the shocking drops in frame rate, the incredibly obtrusive loading times or even the fact that Lightsabers don't chop limbs or heads off. But the truth of the matter is that there's so much that's right about *Knights*, it would be unfair to do so. It has a captivating story (complete with a few twists), three-dimensional characters made all the more believable by the generally excellent voice acting, and it gives enormous control and freedom to the player. With it, BioWare has cemented itself as the number-one RPG developer outside of Japan… oh, and has made just about the best *Star Wars* videogame ever in the process. And that, on all the previous evidence, is no mean feat.

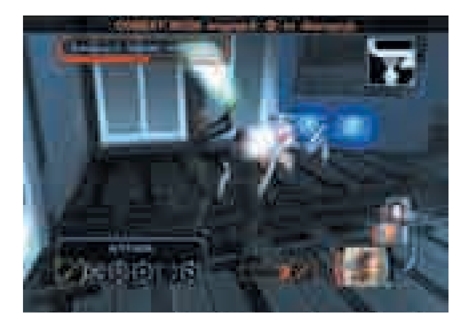


VERDICT 9/10

AN INSPIRATIONAL USE OF THE STAR WARS LICENCE

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURER

Creating your character in the game is one of the most important things you'll do when playing *Knights* – after all, you'll be be stuck with it for at least 30 hours. You can pick from male or female, and then one of three different classes – Scoundrel, Soldier or Scout, each with different abilities. Next, you choose a portrait from a fairly large selection, before selecting specific skills and allotting points to each of your character's abilities. Oh, and you also have to give them a name. Of course, you could get the computer to do all of this for you. The choice, as is the main theme of *Knights*, is yours…





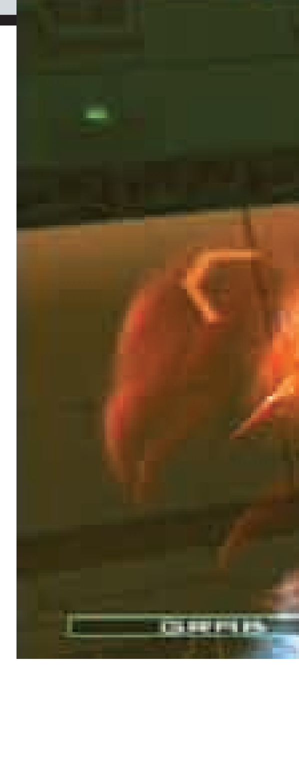
Most conversations will give the option of being nice or nasty to people. Remember kids, hate leads to suffering.

FAQs

Q. CAN MY LIGHTSABER BE PURPLE?
Yep. You can pick any colour (and indeed combination) of Lightsaber: purple, red, blue, green or yellow.

Q. CAN I MAKE FRIENDS?
There are nine characters who can join your team, but only two can be in your immediate party at a time.

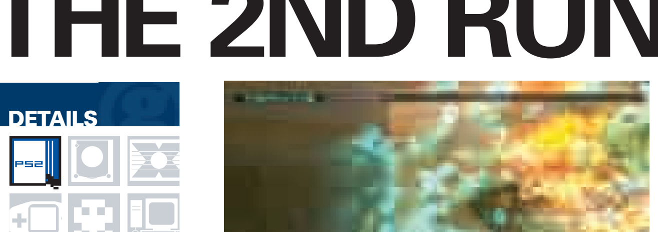
Q. JUDGE ME BY MY SIZE?
Completing just the main story will take between 15-20 hours, but include all the side quests and you're talking closer to 40.



THE SAME GAME, ONLY BETTER… AND YET NOT. THAT'S THE KONAMI WAY

ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
26 September

PLAYERS
1-2



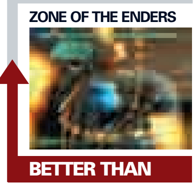
Good things come to those who wait – although, as gamers, we have to wait more than most. Even then, it doesn't necessarily guarantee quality, as many long-term gamers or those who've had the joy of playing *Angel Of Darkness* will attest. However, when a company admits to deliberately holding back a game in order to address the problems in versions released in other territories, there's at least a chance that things can only get better. Or so we'd like to think, anyway.

Of course, those of you who've already considered turning the page out of fear of all the giant robots in the screenshots should take comfort in the fact that *Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner* isn't a 'proper' mecha game as such. While it is packed with flying robots and other mecha-related things, it certainly isn't as complicated as something like the *Armored Core* series. In fact, the two games are hardly comparable – going on the complex story, frantic action and mission structure in *ZOE2*, it's closer to Capcom's *Devil May Cry* (albeit with a giant robotic suit in the place of Dante). Still, you couldn't really expect anything less from a game with Hideo Kojima's name on it; despite only being a producer on this project, his influence is visible from the off.

There's also some good news if you missed out on the last *ZOE* outing; no prior knowledge is needed to enjoy this sequel. Essentially, the core gameplay is pretty similar to last time – taking control of the much-desired Orbital Frame codenamed Jehuty, it's your job to wipe out pretty much anything that moves in an effort to bring down the tyrannical forces of BAHRAM and generally save the day. The difference from last time, though, is the range of mission objectives; whereas previously almost every mission was the

Enemies that like to block a lot can be a real pain until you get the Gauntlet upgrade – or you just grab them and hurl them into a wall…

ZONE OF THE ENDERS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DEVIL MAY CRY







It's not all about swinging your big Plasma Sword – you'll have to use your head rather than your fists sometimes.

Along with these familiar view-screen sections, *ZOE2* also has full-on anime cut-scenes that really help get the story across.



same (destroy enemies, protect buildings and stay alive), now there's some variety, from saving a fellow robot and destroying key installations to taking down an entire armada of ships. This also means there's greater variety in the locations to visit, which is a big step up from the endless fields of blue we saw last time.

Indeed, it appears that many of the good things in *ZOE2* revolve around lessons learnt from the previous game – clearly, someone high up listened to the complaints and tried to do something about them. As well as having more areas to explore and some rather awe-inspiring levels further into the game, for example, the Jehuty suit has received some new skills; most notably, the ability to grab enemies and use them as a melee weapon against others, or as a shield to deflect oncoming attacks. Things have also been stepped up a notch visually so that *ZOE2* really is a beautiful game. With its unique mixture of clean-cut robot models, cel-shaded smoke, particle effects and manga FMV cut-scenes, the whole thing just oozes style in a way that most other games just can't approach.

With that in mind, it's a shame that some small (but rather important) elements let the game down. Despite having a wide variety of missions, for instance, the core concept of attacking enemies is one that gets rather samey far too quickly – most enemies, bar the bosses, can be dealt with in the same way, leading to lengthy bouts of pressing the same button over and over. With so much repetition, it's doubtful that you'd want to play through the game again once you've finished it; however, that's exactly what you have to do in order to unlock most of the game's secrets. Sadly, the story is also flawed thanks to some duff translation, meaning the narrative ends up being incredibly confusing at times – a very bad thing for a game that relies so heavily on the plot. Add a badly implemented Versus mode and extra missions that are just reworked stages from the main game, and it's all a bit of a mixed bag really.

Still, this isn't to say that *ZOE2* is a bad game; as long as you're not looking for something too deep and meaningful, it'll certainly keep you going for a while. If, on the other hand, you're hoping for a massive leap forward from the last game, it looks like you're just going to have to keep waiting…

VERDICT 6/10

OVERLY REPETITIVE AND CONFUSING, BUT STILL FUN

FULLY UPGRADEABLE

If you want to have any hope of surviving some of the later battles that *ZOE2* offers, you'll have to master all of the upgrades that the Jehuty suit receives throughout the game. Although you'll only have the option to grab your enemies and use them as a weapon or shield against other robots to begin with, various enhancements will gradually be added to the suit to give you additional abilities. From paralysing your foes for a brief period (leaving them open to attack) and creating duplicates of yourself to create a distraction, to an unstoppable beam of energy that wipes out anything in its path, there's a wide variety of abilities on offer – it's just a case of knowing which one to use at the right time. Thankfully, it's all pretty straightforward (unlike most other advanced mecha games we could mention).

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LEVEL PEGGING: *ZOE2*'s levels have loads of variety, being based in many different locations.

GANG WARFARE: The group battles here seem more frantic than those in the original game.



Some stages require the quick destruction of many enemies, such as this part which sees you chasing a runaway train.

FAQs

Q. WHAT'S NEW?

Over the original Japanese *ZOE2*, the PAL version now has three new levels, two 'reworked' ones and a host of new polygon models, as well as new difficulty modes and graphical demos.

Q. DON'T LIKE MECHA?

Although there are certainly plenty of robots on show, this isn't really a 'proper' mecha game – that's what games like *Armored Core 3* are for.

Q. A LITTLE UNFAIR?

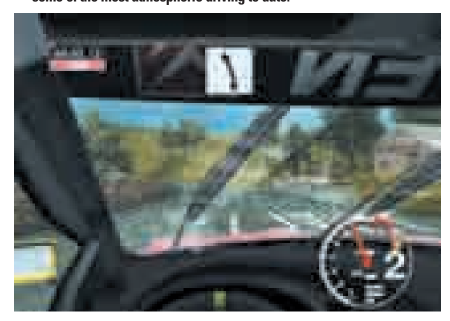
In places, yes. Some of the more intense battles become more luck than judgement to get through, but not as many as you might expect. However, it's not exactly the easiest of games.



Several of the rallies end in lap-based Super Special Stages, making you go head to head against a rival.



The driver view, particularly in the rain or snow, can make for some of the most atmospheric driving to date.





REINFORCING THE WINNING COMBINATION OF RACING AND DIRT

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
19 September

PLAYERS
1-4

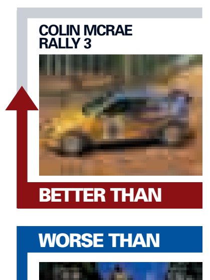
Creating a franchise in today's fickle market can be hard enough for a strong character-based title, which is why an established series of racing games is a rare occurrence. With little more to rely on than the actual quality of the games, very few racers have the consistency and drive (no pun intended) to develop into a successful series without a licensing deal. The *Colin McRae* series is a fine example of this – but far from relying on the big name to shift units, Codemasters creates a genuinely enjoyable rallying experience with each title, and, following the groundwork laid by the third game, we're very interested in this update.

Visually, there's clearly been no holding back, and while the game may only look marginally better than its forerunner, the pop-up that blighted the third title is all but non-existent. Car models do slightly outclass the surroundings but, given the speed at which you'll be tearing past them, this is something you'll more than likely not even notice while the game is in full flow, least of all when it has you ensnared. One setback is the fact that you're never sure what impact your surroundings will have on your car – walls and fences obviously stay more or less where they are but posts, signs and shrubs can cause a little more confusion. While this may be a semi-realistic feature, we've

Race well enough and you'll open up some rather varied new cars – the old-school Escort is a beauty.



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3



BETTER THAN

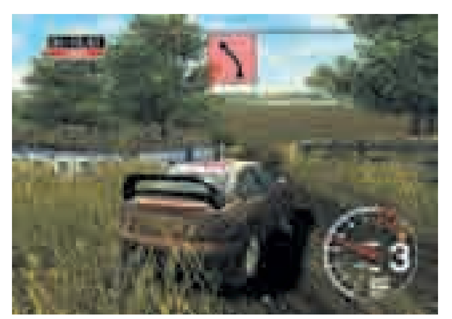
WORSE THAN



SEGA RALLY



Between stages, you get to spend time fixing your car – you'll need to both manage and race well to keep in good shape.



Tearing through the fields of the more rural tracks, it can sometimes be tricky to differentiate between rally track and tractor tracks.

had one too many victories snatched from us by tiny wooden stumps despite laying waste to countless metal road signs.

Still, among our grievances are some truly great features. What is perhaps the best element of this latest update – the in-car view – has obviously been a focus of attention and the benefits are obvious. Speeding between trees on a gravel trail can be exhilarating enough with the default chase camera, but zoom down to the driver's viewpoint and things get that much more intense – engine roar and exterior noise are much louder and you get a far greater sense of speed and immersion. For the ultimate rallying experience, you're also able to switch off all on-screen displays, making your new navigator that much more important. It's this attention to detail and feeling of involvement that sets Colin apart from his rivals – although the sense of speed may not thrill in places, few games can hold a torch to the *McRae* experience.

It would be easy enough to write off *04* as just another rally game if it weren't for some of the excellent new features over last year's offering – co-operative Championships where you pair up with a friend to bring glory to your team, and unique upgrade tests that force you to test new parts to their limits if you want to use them in future rallies. But though the game does improve on many of the lesser areas of its predecessor, at same time it manages to create new grievances. Handling and pop-up have been pretty much fixed, but in exchange we're greeted with a problematic multiplayer mode, some annoying graphical glitches and several other elements that perhaps wouldn't grate so much if *Colin McRae 3* hadn't



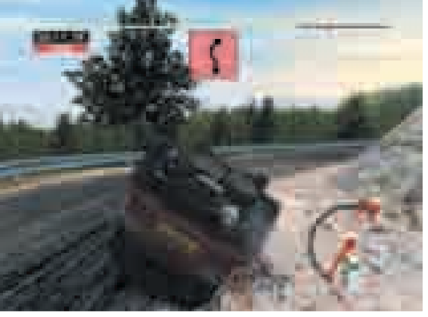
Tuning the car's performance is important for anyone looking to shave seconds off their times, though we prefer just going hell for leather.

FAQs

Q. ONLY COLIN?
Nope. Unlike last year, you get to race as yourself in the vehicle of your choice.

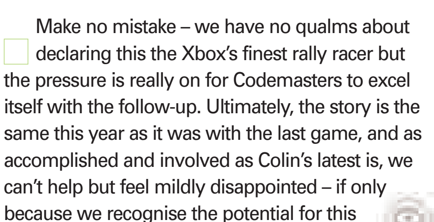
Q. HOW MANY TRACKS?
Eight national rallies at six or seven tracks each. In total, there's upwards of 50 courses.

Q. NASTY POP-UP?
Far better than before – all you'll get is a little fade-in on the more complex courses but even that's barely noticeable.



Well that's not going to help us catch up with Mr McRae now, is it?

already tested the next-generation water. For newcomers, this fourth game is the best place to see what the series is all about, surpassing the previous game in practically every area, though perhaps not as impressive as the PSone titles were in their heyday.



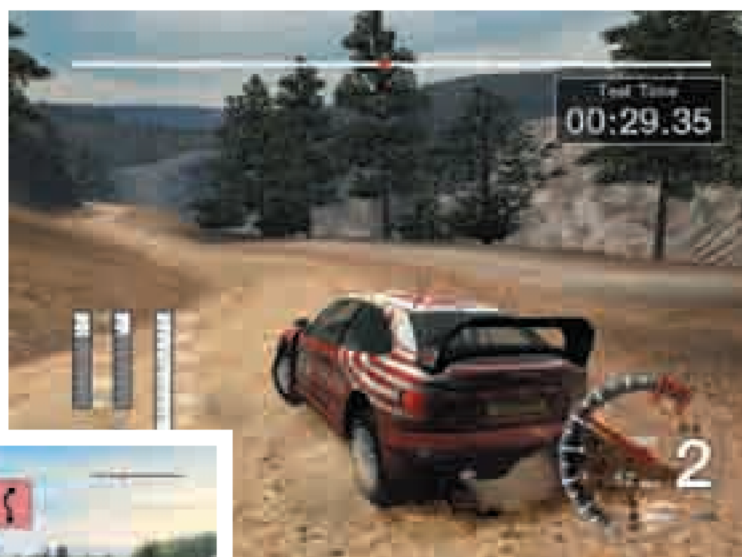
Make no mistake – we have no qualms about declaring this the Xbox's finest rally racer but the pressure is really on for Codemasters to excel itself with the follow-up. Ultimately, the story is the same this year as it was with the last game, and as accomplished and involved as Colin's latest is, we can't help but feel mildly disappointed – if only because we recognise the potential for this series to produce a genre-defining racer.



VERDICT 7/10
INVOLVING AND ENJOYABLE; MCRAE EVOLVES AGAIN

FRAME-RATE BLUES

While we applaud the addition of a split-screen multiplayer mode (an element curiously lacking from *Colin McRae 3*), the sad truth is that the mode is a little below par. With two or more players racing at once, the otherwise smooth frame-rate can be thrown into turmoil, and with the severity varying from course to course the splitscreen action can seem somewhat redundant. This ushers you into the game's clearly favoured alternating multiplayer modes, which wouldn't usually be a problem, but when the rest of the game is so clean and polished it just further accentuates the weaker areas.

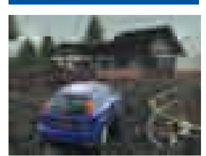


The gauges on the left show how hard you're pushing your car parts in these tests, in this case the tyres. For once, skidding is a good thing…



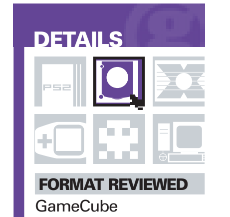
If you thought the dust trails and other environmental effects look good in action, wait until you see the replays – they're really rather special.

PS2 £39.99 19 SEPT



Pretty much a by-the-book PS2-to-Xbox conversion – expect slightly less impressive visuals to be among the only noticeable differences. All credit to Codemasters, though, as the drop in quality is not so noticeable as with many other recent multiformat titles.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99 (Import)

RELEASE
Q1 '04
(US/Japan: Out Now)

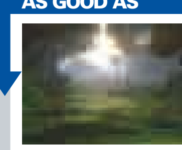
PLAYERS
1-4

ACE GOLF



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



TIGER WOODS 2004

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

LEAVE YOUR 'TEE' AND 'LINKS' PUNS AT THE DOOR, PLEASE

The mixture of golf and videogames is a bizarrely potent one. Golfing games seem to appeal to a far wider audience than the sport itself and even those who have never so much as picked up a club often buy into them. The craziest part is that the sport isn't even particularly well-suited to the medium of games – offering no simultaneous play and requiring a substantial time investment, the experience is fundamentally a primitive one. Nevertheless, such games have an allure that is difficult to place but impossible to deny, and while we may never understand the world's love for digital golf, we'll freely admit to being part of the problem. When done well, golfing can be among the most time-consuming and involving gaming experiences, and if there's one man who knows his way around a set of clubs, it's a plumber. Well, one particular plumber really.

Even from the lavish opening and the first few holes, this latest round of *Mario Golf* exudes class. Character models and effects are of an impressive quality and, short of a few slight camera oddities, Mario and his pals have never looked better. Looking at the box, you'd be led to believe that the sound quality would be of the same level – but though the Pro Logic II logo graces the packaging, *Toadstool Tour* is far removed from the likes of *The Wind Waker* and *Metroid Prime*. Consisting of generally nondescript tunes and a fairly limited selection of quips, the audio aspect of the game is by far the weakest element, yet still manages to just about redeem itself with a few choice cuts. Character voices are fine to a point but when three other players are mashing on their joypads to fill your screen with taunts and abuse, the otherwise amusing lines soon begin to grate. To make matters worse, unless your gaming chums are particularly well-behaved, trying to get them to stop could prove as futile as asking your *Halo* co-op partner to kindly stop hitting you in the back.

One of the best things about *Toadstool Tour* is that even if it weren't for the familiar characters and settings, you'd know it could only have come from one of a select few firms. Over the years, Nintendo has managed to develop a kind of magic normally only associated with the likes of Disney, and the way in which the characters move and act on the courses is simply beautiful. From Diddy and Donkey Kong's simian play styles to Wario and Waluigi's evil cackles and temper tantrums, the wonderfully realised cast is every bit as well

FAQs

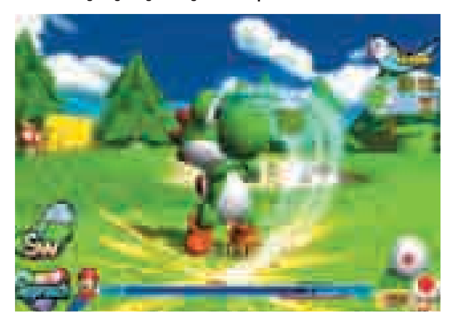
Q. HOW MANY COURSES?
Seven in total, one of which is a jungle course consisting entirely of par 3 holes. Definitely one for hole-in-one seekers.

Q. CHARACTERS?
Twelve pretty obvious ones to start you off, with four less-so following as unlockables, as well as GBA link-up.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
With so much to do so many times, you'll have your work cut out to even come close to doing everything.



All the usual *Mario* suspects are here and all have been superbly realised, giving the game a great atmosphere.



Beginners can get the game to work out their swing for them, but if you want a little more control then you'll want the manual option.

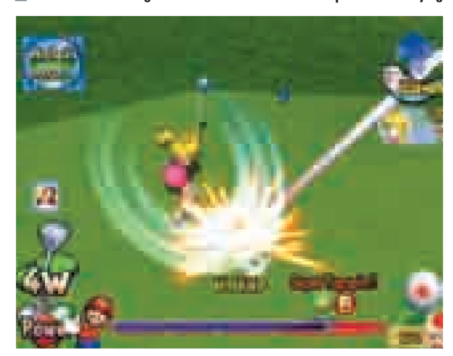


Donkey Kong's swing is somewhat unorthodox. But then he is a monkey so it's rather unfair to expect a Seve Ballesteros-style display.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
CHUNKY: Modes, courses, options… you name it, there's more of it this time around.
LINKED: *Toadstool Tour* will link to the forthcoming *Advance Tour* to give extra characters and suchlike.



What kind of *Mario* game would it be if there weren't piles of Coins lying around, just waiting for someone with deep pockets to come along?





personified as it is rendered. Even the courses themselves are like nothing you'd expect in a golf game – teeing off from boats, avoiding Chomps and using Warp Pipes as shortcuts all come into play, among many other original features.

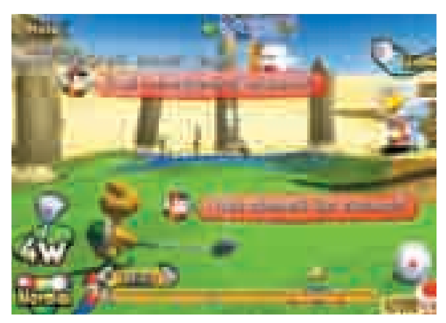
This originality and variety is carried over into play modes as well – in addition to all the expected modes, you'll be treated to target-hitting, Coin-collecting, slot machines and a massive amount of challenges and tasks. Many of these will need to be completed with every character and even in co-operative multiplayer in order to claim true victory, but with a decent amount of unlockables and augmentations up for grabs, you'll not go unrewarded. We put a fair few hours into the game but still managed to be ashamed by the Records screens – if you seriously want to leave an impression on the checklists and charts, we're talking hundreds, if not thousands of hours of play. But don't worry – many of the key extras can be made available with substantially less effort, though you'll have to work on your game to see them all.

Despite all the primary-coloured bells and whistles, *Toadstool Tour* is still a golf game – a very good one, but a golf game nonetheless. If you're not a fan of the sport or games that simulate it, we doubt our moustachioed friend will change your mind. Just realistic enough so as not to alienate avid golfers and with enough enjoyment and simplicity to welcome beginners with open arms, *Mario Golf* is a typical 'easy to play, difficult to master' affair. With so much to do, it's easy to lose hours on just one mode, and taking into consideration the multiplayer elements and potential for repeat plays there's probably more to do than you ever actually will. The cutesy presentation belies a more competent engine than many would guess – golf isn't all about Tigers and Outlaws any more.



EASY DOES IT

One of the best aspects of *Mario Golf* is the ease of the swing system yet the complexity it manages to hide. For beginners, two simple taps of the A button is all it takes to perform a mighty drive, but it won't be long before you find you need a little more control over your shots. When this happens, you'll need to use Manual mode whereby pressing B to stop the power bar means you have to gauge accuracy yourself. The payoff is that you gain greater control of the ball, allowing for all manner of spin to be applied. Given the broad variety of modes on offer, you really will find yourself using both methods, and while precision is required on the tougher courses, the 'hit and hope' technique is more suited to Speed Golf and lazy play alike.



In multiplayer, the controller can be used to unleash insults or encouraging comments towards your opponent.



The Congo Canopy course is a birdie-hunter's dream – par 3 holes all the way, so there's no excuse for double-figures on that scorecard.



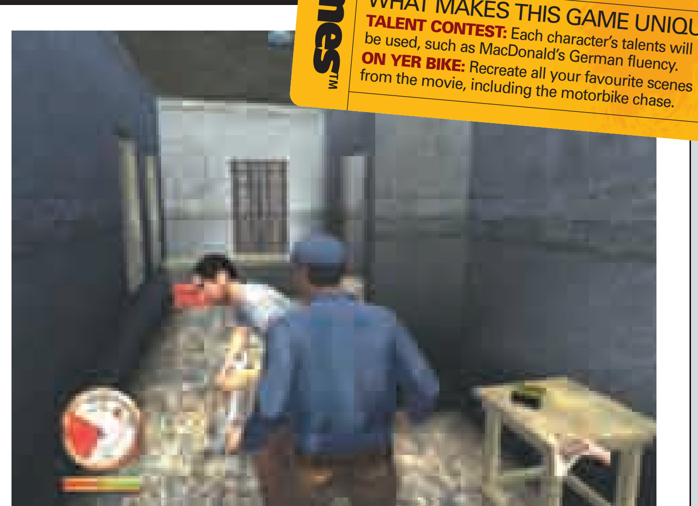
games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TALENT CONTEST: Each character's talents will be used, such as MacDonald's German fluency.

ON YER BIKE: Recreate all your favourite scenes from the movie, including the motorbike chase.





WILL THE GAMEPLAY PROVE AS ADDICTIVE AS THE THEME TUNE?

THE GREAT ESCAPE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
SCi

DEVELOPER
Pivotal Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

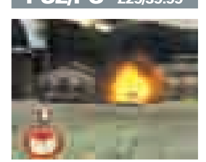
Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without it, the theme tune has become a national institution and now SCi is giving us the chance to indulge in a videogame re-enactment of classic Sixties flick *The Great Escape*. Players control lead characters MacDonald, Sedgewick, Hendley and 'Cooler King' Virgil Hilts through some of the film's most memorable scenes during the daring attempt to escape maximum security POW camp Stalag Luft III. Before embarking on the most ambitious breakout in history, however, you'll get the chance to master the art of escapology in a series of missions cataloguing the events leading up to each character's incarceration.

As you'd imagine, there's plenty of stealth-based gameplay as you're frequently tasked with sneaking between prison huts without arousing the suspicions of your watchful captors. However, unlike last year's WWII escape sim *Prisoner Of War*, a good helping of action has been thrown in to produce a much more varied experience. The action opens with a dogfight sequence that sees the laughably camp MacDonald battling in vain to protect his squadron of Lancaster Bombers against a swarm of German fighters. A host of other vehicles must also be commandeered as the game progresses, culminating in the famous motorcycle chase as Hilts makes his spirited dash for the border.

Sadly, this promising variety of stealth, third-person shooter and vehicle-based gameplay sees each element being delivered half baked. A distinct vein of average runs throughout the game, from the lacklustre visuals to each mission's overly linear string of objectives. Rather than feeling like a mastermind escapologist, your actual role resembles that of an errand boy collecting the pieces of a pre-scripted plan. Yet while nothing here really shines, the overall package is solid enough to counter our gripes. The AI pulls off the stealth sections nicely, progress can be saved at any point to avoid the frustration of entire level restarts, and the diverse gameplay sections keep the interest level up. It all makes for a fairly entertaining affair, but is unlikely to enjoy as many replays as its movie counterpart.

VERDICT 5/10
DISTINCTLY AVERAGE IN EVERY DEPARTMENT


PS2/PC £29/39.99



The rather basic visual style doesn't suffer too much on translation to PS2, whilst the PC version is predictably the slickest of the bunch with intuitive mouse/keyboard controls to boot.

PRISONER OF WAR



BETTER THAN

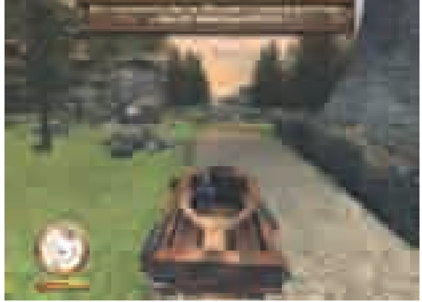
WORSE THAN



007: NIGHTFIRE



There are some sections where stealth just won't cut it.



You'll get to drive a range of vehicles including, surprise, a motorbike.



The guards maintain perfect posture, even while sleeping on the job…

TRUST US, IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT SOUNDS

FREESTYLE METALX

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Deibus Studios

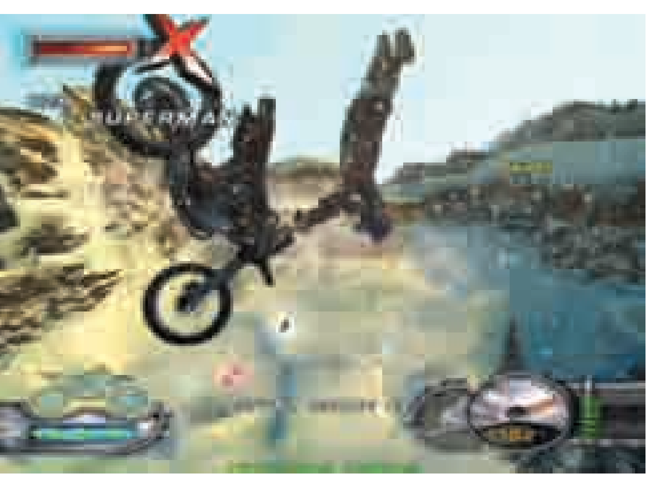
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
19 September

PLAYERS
1-2

Having witnessed the evolution of the *Tony Hawk* series from limited trickery to huge freeform objectives, we can see the direction in which the genre is shifting and it's certainly a turn for the better. Strangely, a lot of the new twists in extreme sports games are taking them closer to adventure games and, odder still, MMORPGs – it's not unthinkable that the next generation of titles will offer huge lifelike recreations of real world locations on a level of freedom surpassing even the likes of *Vice City*. Still, it's great to see titles in the current generation attempting such freedom, and while we have come to expect great things of Neversoft and Z-Axis, it's even more pleasing to see similar ambition from less expected sources. Enter *Freestyle MetalX*.

At a first glance, you'd be forgiven for mistaking *FMX* for any number of similar titles – the 'devil horns' presentation is nothing new although it does suit the style of the game. The gritty front end is carried over into in-game presentation, showing off some decent character models and environments (albeit with limited draw distance) and the expected rock soundtrack which expands as you complete key events. Arguably, *MetalX*'s strongest area is its sheer variety – on top of basic *Tony Hawk's*-style objectives, you're required to compete in Big Air contests, races, stunt shows and more in order to earn enough cash to see the later levels. The levels are impressive in scale and, better still, become interconnected as you unlock them, meaning once you unlock them all, you can ride freely around the entire game world. If nothing else, the intent to get one up on Mr Hawk is clear.



We're no experts but that really doesn't look safe – here's hoping for a happy landing. Or a miracle, of course.

Unfortunately, this determination to produce massive and free environments is also part of the game's downfall. As impressive as they can be, the game engine simply cannot keep up at times, resulting in slowdown, pop-up and some glitching which annoy more than ruin the game but still taint the quality of the overall product. So while the glitches and some of the less impressive collision detection frustrate more as the game goes on, there's still an underlying enjoyment that these flaws can't extinguish completely. Between the variety, the playability and the great feeling of accomplishment that comes from completing one of the many tasks, *FMX* is really quite good fun – while far from perfect, it just manages to overcome its weak spots, making for yet another extreme sports 'almost'.

SX SUPERSTAR



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MAT HOFFMAN PRO BMX 2



VERDICT 6/10
OVERLY AMBITIOUS BUT FUN NONETHELESS

FINGERPRINT
games™
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
STUNTMAN: As well as fulfilling objectives, you can parade your circus skills in the Stunt Arena.
SPRAWLING: Each level you unlock links to the rest, ultimately making for a huge play area.



Since the Special bar depletes extremely quickly, you'll need to wheelie between tricks to keep it lit.



The Stunt Arena is one of the best parts of the game, especially in the great multiplayer modes.







These *Robocop*-style news reports pop up between levels, helping to cement the story together in a very tongue-in-cheek way.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
Denmark

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

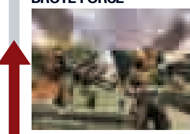
DEVELOPER
Io Interactive

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
19 September

PLAYERS
1–4

BRUTE FORCE



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

THE RUSSIANS CAME IN TWO BY TWO – HURRAH, HURRAH…

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Pop quiz, hotshot – there's a legion of heavily-armed Russians at your door, your brother's been kidnapped and the entire country's in the grip of a heartless dictator. What do you do? While we're not too sure that grabbing the nearest rifle and joining the local rebel contingent would be our first choice in real life, it's certainly the order of the day in *Freedom Fighters*, EA's interesting take on the squad-based strategy genre. However, *Rainbow Six*, this ain't – if you're looking for a methodical game that requires planning and efficient use of troops then you're in the wrong place, soldier.

Placing the emphasis firmly on brawn rather than brain (although some thought is required) this is a tactical squad-based shoot-'em-up with a distinctly arcade flavour – and it shows, thanks to the simplicity of the gameplay. Commanding your troops is done with a combination of three buttons – one for attacking, one for defending and a third to make them follow you around. Tapping the button causes a single rebel to react to your command, while holding it down sends all your men out to do your bidding; you just face the direction in which you want them to go and they'll do it. Even better, you can use the over-the-shoulder gun sight to pinpoint exact locations for your men to head for, which makes maintaining control much easier. But before you can order people around, you've got to recruit them, and for that you need Charisma…

The circles in the top-left corner of the screen represent how many rebels you can take under



This talkative kid pops up to offer some sage advice every so often.



Once under your command, rebels will do anything you tell them.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY MEN?
If you manage to complete all the sub-missions and find most of the hidden casualties, you'll be able to earn enough respect to command up to 12 rebels at once.

Q. HOW MUCH FREEDOM?
You can choose the order in which you complete the areas within each stage as you see fit. However, you'll have to partially explore areas and then go elsewhere if you want to set up any chain reactions to help you out…

Q. CHAIN REACTIONS?
Doing certain tasks in particular areas will help you out – for instance, collecting the C4 in one area will allow you to blow up enemy installations in another, stemming the flow of soldiers in the third. See?

FRIENDLY FIRE

As well as the solid (and lengthy) single-player story, *Freedom Fighters* also has a multiplayer mode that up to four people can enjoy. Well, we say 'enjoy' – sadly, while it has the same basic concept as the main game, it's actually not much fun to play. Once you've chosen your side (Soviet or American), the idea is to set out and capture bunkers and the main flag checkpoint for your team; doing so creates soldiers for you to recruit, meaning you can defend your turf to the hilt. It sounds good in theory, but it turns out to be boring and frustrating, which is a real shame. What we can't understand is why Io didn't include a two-player Co-op mode for the main story, allowing friends to team up against the Russians. Now that would have been fun.



Without a rocket launcher, helicopters are virtually indestructible.

The main rebel base is where you plan your attacks. It fills up with weapons as you successfully complete each raid.

The main objective of each stage is to raise the American flag. Yeah, that'll really stop those pesky Russians in their caterpillar tracks…

your wing at any one time; when you fill up your Charisma meter, you'll be rewarded with another circle. Main objectives will obviously contribute to your meter, but you can also boost your Charisma by completing secondary missions and healing wounded civilians found around each level – something that becomes vital the further you get through the game. This healing ability also applies to your own men; should they get hit you'll have a short amount of time to track them down and revive them. Losing men damages your Charisma and reduces your chances of success, so you'll want to keep as many of them alive as possible.

While all this might sound a little complicated for an arcade-style game, it really isn't in practice. Ultimately, you can use your men in many different ways – from creating a distraction and laying down covering fire to manning machine-guns, defending positions and even acting as a human shield should things go horribly wrong. It's far less intricate than a regular squad-based game, yet it retains all the elements that make them fun – as opposed to a title like *Brute Force*, which had none of them. With some massive levels and a decent amount of planning required to get through each scenario (though not too much to put action fans off their dinners), it should keep most people happy.

But that isn't to say that the game is flawless. For example, the AI suffers slightly in places – particularly in the case of the Russians who, for an overwhelming invading force, seem to be rather stupid at times, allowing you to take out an entire platoon of men single-handed. Thankfully, this doesn't happen all the time and more often than not, you'll see enemies diving for cover away from your gunfire, returning fire as they retreat and even setting up ambushes a little further down the road.

Even when you take into account some other minor gripes on top of the AI (such as the messy multiplayer mode and some occasional graphical glitches), there's still no denying that *Freedom Fighters* is a very impressive effort and a damn fun game to boot. With a little bit more polish in the multiplayer mode and maybe even some online support, we'd have been inclined to knock the score up even further – as it is, the promise of a great single-player experience should be more than enough to have you 'russian' out for this little gem (sorry).



A FINE DISPLAY OF IO'S CREATIVE TALENT

games™ **FUSED**

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

NO 1 IN TEAM: Squad-based strategies let you plan your attack and use your men effectively.

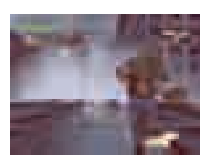
SHOOT FIRST: The emphasis is on action here – there's rarely a moment when the gunfire stops.

GAMECUBE £39.99 19 SEPT



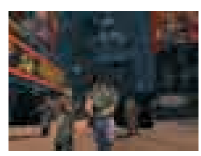
Thanks to the simplicity of the control system, the 'Cube version doesn't lose out much on the controller front. It also retains many of the graphical nuances of the Xbox version.

PC £29.99 19 SEPT



While the PC version doesn't require a monster machine to run, it's the keyboard/mouse controls that may put people off. Of course, it still looks lovely when run properly.

PS2 £39.99 19 SEPT



The PS2 version doesn't look that different from the Xbox one. However, you will need a multitap if you even want to think about using those multiplayer modes.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
LSP

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

IT SEEMS THAT PARACHUTES, TANKS AND HELICOPTERS ARE THE NORM IN HELL

CT SPECIAL FORCES: BACK TO HELL

Old classics never truly die – they merely get repackaged and crop up in various other guises. This rings especially true in the world of videogames, so nary an eyebrow was raised when developers picked at the warm corpse of SNK (now freshly revived, of course) and plundered the finer moments of its back catalogue. At least that should explain why *CT Special Forces: Back To Hell* bears such close resemblance to *Metal Slug*…

Nearly all the elements of SNK's classic series have made it to LSP's game, from the 2D side-scrolling firefights to the controllable tanks. Even the trademark highly detailed and fluid cartoon animation has made it intact. While matching up well to its obvious inspiration, *CT Special Forces* still lacks the spark of imagination and intensity that made *Metal Slug* so special; nevertheless, it's a pretty good take on the landmark game and a blast to play. While the side-scrolling shooting does make up the bulk of the game, there are other sections that have to be tackled as well, such as parachuting behind enemy lines or picking off terrorists with a sniper rifle. It's rare that two consecutive sections will play the same, which motivates gamers to find out what further surprises are in store – these extra sub-games are straightforward and the different controls are easy to grasp, so they complement the main game rather than intrude on it. However, this approach can feel scattershot and not all the stages are that good (the top-down helicopter sections spring to mind), but on the whole it's a novel way to break up the pace.

However, it's a shame that the game comes to an end so soon. There are five levels in total and while each consists of various stages, they're fairly short, meaning it isn't long before the final boss falls and the credits are rolling. Bearing this in mind, it's something of an oversight that a weak narrative has been used to hold the game together rather than some sort of scoring system; with no high scores to topple, there's little reason to return to the game once beaten. *Metal Slug* was always going to be a tough act to follow, which makes it even more disappointing that *CT Special Forces* has come up just short of its target. At any rate, it's a fun, solid game that won't tax your brain but will give your trigger finger a workout.

CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
TIME TO KILL: Challenge mode lets you link-up with another GBA to race against another player on slimmed-down levels, the winner being whoever completes them quickest.

VERDICT 6/10
SOME GREAT MOMENTS BUT ULTIMATELY SHORT-LIVED

CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER

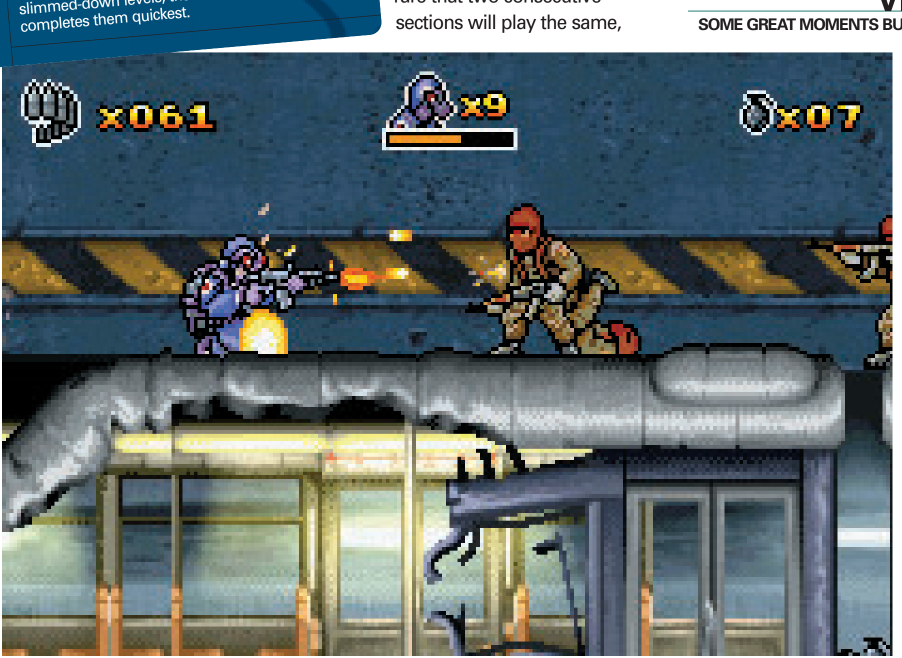


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



METAL SLUG



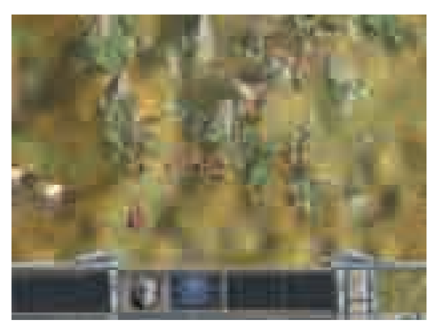
The subway level is short but surprisingly tough, due to the amount of mini-gun-wielding goons on board. Sadly, the 'too short' criticism is one that can be levelled at the game as a whole, and the lack of a high score table is a bit disappointing.



It might look like you need to protect your ride but the driver is completely safe while you can get hurt. Easy for some, eh?



We don't recommend that you hold your breath for a silver screen adaptation of the plot, you'll probably suffocate.

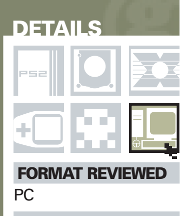

Battles aren't the spectacle they could be, but the vast array of combat moves provides enough tactical choices to keep things interesting.


Thanks to the tutorial, newcomers shouldn't be intimidated.



Cities can be used to train units, as well as provide a base for your wizard.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Netherlands

PUBLISHER
Take 2

DEVELOPER
Triumph Studios

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-8 online)

MINIMUM SPEC
450MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 900MB HDD space, 16MB 3D graphics card

AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC

YOU'LL NEVER NEED THAT 20-SIDED DICE AGAIN…

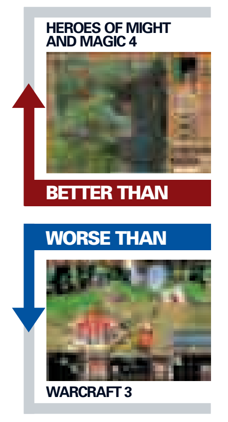
Not to be confused with Ensemble Studios' hugely successful *Age Of…* real-time strategy titles, Triumph's turn-based *Age Of Wonders* series has provided fans of epic fantasy battles with a couple of must-have additions to their PC collection. Yet outside hard-core circles of dice-rolling strategists, the genre itself generally struggles to set too many pulses racing among the gaming community as a whole. *Shadow Magic* looks to shed some of the 'newcomers need not apply' mentality, however, by including a comprehensive tutorial and packaging what might otherwise have been a regular expansion pack as a reasonably priced standalone game.

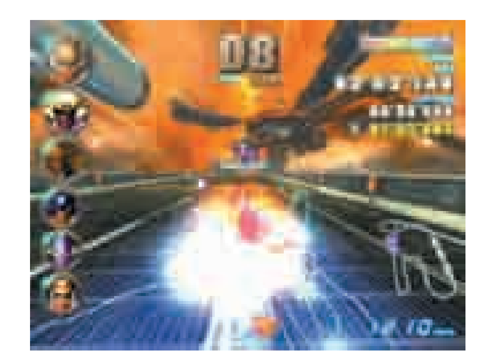
The basic premise involves accumulating a formidable collection of heroes and mythical creatures to follow your mighty wizard in a variety of quests against the dark forces that threaten to engulf the land. Friendly cities can be fortified against attack while you develop them into thriving bases that provide your cause with the resources and well-trained combat units you'll need to overcome the armies of your foes. As you tactically manoeuvre your various parties of warriors around the map, you may choose to play out the battles you'll encounter in all their glory or let the computer generate the result of more tedious conflicts for you to save time. The battles themselves are filled with an intriguing number of strategic possibilities thanks to a fabulous variation of character races, unit types, combat abilities, skills and, of course, magical spells. This is certainly where the game excels as every conceivable breed of combatant from Yetis to Dragons bring their unique talents to the fray in the epic battlefield clashes.

The in-game graphics are as primitive as ever – simply doing their job of representing the positions of your various units around the map – and the basic turn-based concept won't be every gamer's cup of tea. But with more variety and strategic depth than any of the previous *AOW* titles, there are plenty of reasons for fans and beginners alike to immerse themselves in *Shadow Magic*'s world of adventure.



SOLID ADDITION TO A DECENT SERIES









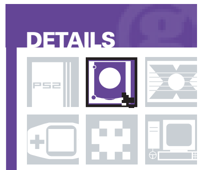
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SILKY SMOOTH: Running smoothly and looking great are two of the many things *F-Zero* does well.

CHOICES: The shop, Story mode and amount of customisation make this the most varied *F-Zero* yet.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Amusement Vision

PRICE
¥5,800

RELEASE
Q4 '03
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

HOW CAN A GAME TRAVELLING AT OVER 1,000 KM/H TAKE SO LONG TO REACH US?

F-ZERO GX

As gamers, we're all too used to home versions of games paling in comparison to their arcade counterparts. We've been subjected to sluggish ports, huge borders and even censorship and alteration so often that it's almost expected of certain companies to release substandard products – even more so with the PAL market. Thankfully, as Namco continues to prove with its excellent home console titles, the art of conversion is not a dead one, just one that requires a lot more work with today's more complex games. *F-Zero GX* is an odd case (given that it isn't really a direct port so much as a sister title), but how often is it that you can say a home game is every bit as good as – if not marginally better than – its coin-op counterpart? Exactly…

Stunning is the only word that can come close to describing just how beautiful *GX* really is. From the looping rollercoaster tracks to the lovingly crafted backdrops and superb ships, you can really see the attention to detail that makes AV the perfect heir to the *F-Zero* throne. At times, the frantic action does bear strange similarities to *Super Monkey Ball*, or, more specifically, the Monkey Race mini-game – the two couldn't be much more different, yet the flying sparks and twisting planes occasionally reminded us of Amusement Vision's simian masterpiece. It's not even as though *GX* is just a pretty face, either; showcasing some truly awesome course design and flinging around graphical effects that put most titles to shame, this is one game that might well have you reaching for a sick bag. In a good way, naturally. In the same manner, the music takes those familiar tunes you've sped along to in the past and gives them the 21st Century treatment – the pseudo-dynamic soundtrack perfectly complements the high-speed action.

Despite being related to an arcade game, you're not left wanting in terms of options and modes – each of the nine blocks on the title screen leads to an equally enjoyable or functional mode. These include the token multiplayer options that,

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY SHIPS?
Four from the off, with plenty more to buy in the F-Zero Shop, several secrets and the ability to make your own – upwards of 40 in total.

Q. STORY MODE?
Yep, nine levels worth. But contrary to early reports, you can only play as Captain Falcon.

Q. TOO FAST?
While the excessive speed has had its critics in Japan, we found it to be more or less spot on.



The cockpit view is a one-way ticket to sick city, and while it's not easy to play, the experience is second to none.



Story mode gives you some wonderfully varied tasks – racing Goroh down a boulder-filled canyon is a highlight.



Boosting triggers a huge electrical pulse to spew forth from your machine as it careers towards light speed.

even without LAN play or a full pack of cars, make for some of the best four-player frivolity on the GameCube. There are even detailed character backgrounds (right down to all of the racers having their own theme songs) as well as the full complement of Cups, Practice and Time Attack options we've come to expect. One sorely missed feature from the N64 era is Death Race mode, and while a similar event in Story mode almost makes up for it, there's just something special about the high-speed destruction derby that has made us dust off our N64s. As if there wasn't already enough to keep you occupied, tickets won in events can be used to upgrade your created craft and unlock plenty of new ships in the F-Zero Shop, though getting them all will take a fair few Championship victories.



One of the major criticisms that has been levelled at *GX* by the Japanese has been that it is just too fast – however, we beg to differ. While the excessive speeds on some courses can approach eye-melting territory, this only becomes a problem on a couple of tracks, and even then it only encourages better course knowledge and use of boosts. As with a few recent Japanese titles though, *F-Zero* does quickly reach an insane level of difficulty and while you'll probably breeze through Novice and see off Standard quickly enough, Expert level and above will have you tearing your hair out for months to come. Story mode is much the same – each chapter has three levels of difficulty and let's just say that if you want to complete your garage, you'd better get practising. And practising. And practising…

As import-friendly as the Japanese version is, by the time you read this *F-Zero GX* will be gracing American shelves and be little over a month away from die-hard PAL gamers. Falling somewhere between the original and the N64 update (albeit slightly closer to the latter), we're sure there will be those who claim this new *F-Zero* pales in comparison to its SNES grandfather, but while we will freely admit that it's somewhat removed, it's far from inferior. A deceptively deep title with a level of variety seldom seen in the genre, we can safely say that titles of this strength are a rarity, and as both a continuation of a well-loved series and a standalone racer, *F-Zero GX* is everything we hoped it would be.



VERDICT 9/10

RAPIDLY APPROACHING RACING PERFECTION

NO PREVIOUS OWNERS

On top of the already impressive garage that can be accumulated by spending a little cash in the game's shop, one of the finest features of *F-Zero GX* is the ability to build your own craft from a wide selection of parts. Components can be unlocked through Story mode, and by the time you've made good progress through Falcon's events you should be able to create quite the mean machine. However, it's not all about statistics – you're also able to decorate your ride with paint schemes, decals and patterns to your liking. Billy was certainly a fan of the leopard-skin behemoth we built for him…



Detail is slightly reduced in multiplayer (more so in three- and four-player) but speed and frame-rate don't suffer at all.





Track splits like this are common on later courses, making your racing life that bit more confusing.

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY, YOU WON'T FIND ANY BIG SURPRISES

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GC, PC, GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

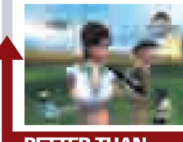
DEVELOPER
EA Redwood Shores

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
26 September

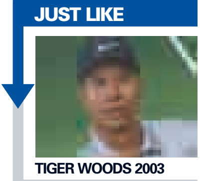
PLAYERS
1-4

OUTLAW GOLF



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



TIGER WOODS 2003

Over the years, Electronic Arts has earned itself a reputation for releasing updates of games with very little in the way of progression or change. Admittedly, it has started to make more of an effort but, unfortunately, the team behind *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* must have missed the memo as this latest release is yet another annual update with minimal changes. While there's nothing inherently wrong with *Tiger Woods 2004*, the series has boxed itself into a corner.

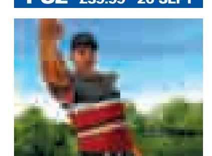
Golf doesn't translate into the most complex of videogames and EA has recreated the controls to a, er, tee. Imitating a swing with the analogue stick is still as satisfying as ever, and the balance between control and room for error is nigh-on perfect. Even better, the multiplayer is excellent, inducing the right amount of swearing, agony and punching the air in triumph. However, the controls are almost exactly the same as before and it would have been nice to see a few more changes to keep the experience fresh.

Speaking of changes, the big new addition is that you can now create a golfer for use in Career mode, teeing off against rivals and racking up the cash. You can then spend your winnings on attributes for your character or trivial things like celebrations and clothes – it's even possible to attract the attention of sponsors such as Adidas, who'll pay you to wear their sports gear. Throw in matches against real pros and it does feel like you're actually out on a professional golf circuit. Other than that though, the improvements are pretty much as you'd expect – just some new courses, new characters and so on.

While there's no doubt that it's a solid golf game that's engrossing and fun, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* just doesn't feel like a true sequel. Anyone who wants a golf game will have probably already played one of the previous iterations in the series – if you haven't, then now is the perfect time for your introduction to *Tiger Woods*. But if you're already a lucky owner of the last instalment, you should think carefully before parting with your cash.

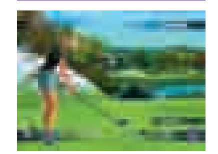
VERDICT 7/10
SOLID, BUT TOO SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR'S EFFORT

PS2 £39.99 26 SEPT



EA has lavished the PS2 version with online options including leaderboards, weekly tournaments and private tournaments open to only the best players. This makes for the best version and, arguably, the only one that feels like a true sequel.

GC £39.99 26 SEPT



The GameCube version links up with the Game Boy Advance so you can transfer winnings and unlock extra tournaments. It's a nice addition but, as with the Xbox version, still not enough to justify putting '2004' in the title.



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
FISH AND CHIPS: You can now use chip shots – ideal for a delicate approach near the green.
FRANKENSTEIN: You can create your own golfing character, right down to shoe size and jewellery

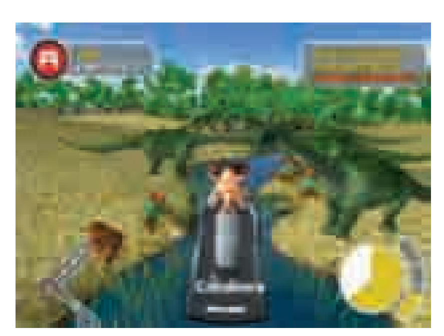
Tiger's here, along with a load of other real-life PGA pro golfers, so those of you who like things more realistic are in for a treat. However, you can also create your own golfer and then show the professionals how it's done – although you shouldn't expect the same results in the real world.



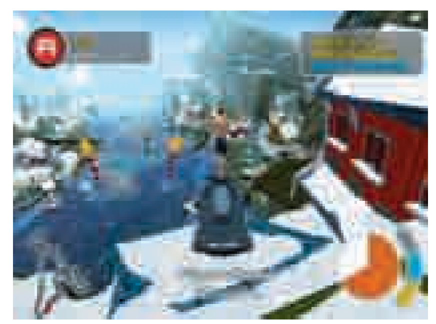
Practice makes perfect – but if it's big money you want, you'll need to best these unique indoor training courses.



Yes, it still all looks rather lovely. Unfortunately, there's not much more you can do with grass and sand when it already looks this nice.



Basic stunts are all very well, but if it's big points you're after then you'll have to go for the more daring tricks after grabbing some air.



Stereotypical levels abound – such as this rather obvious ice track.



The tracks change mid-race – this ship explodes, for example, allowing you to race straight through a hole in the middle instead of having to go round.

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

STUNT-A-LICIOUS: *Splashdown 2* has over 75 stunts – more than twice as many as in the original.

PAR FOR THE COURSE: The World Circuit courses are more interesting thanks to the cartoon stylings.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Rainbow Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

SPLASHDOWN 2: RIDES GONE WILD

HOW MANY STEREOTYPES CAN YOU POSSIBLY FIT INTO ONE GAME?

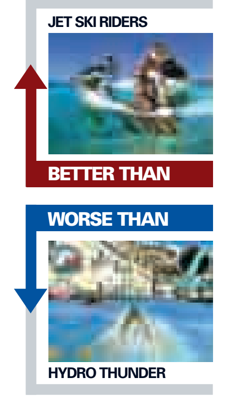
Much like ice cream, videogame sequels come in several flavours – in particular, the always-popular Rehashed Original (mmm, tasty) or the exquisite Brand New Concept, which, sadly, is often too sweet for some developers' tastes. Of course, you can't always guess which you're going to get when you're dealing with titles that only did reasonably well first time out. Take *Splashdown*, for example: originally, the emphasis was on realism – not just of the water, but also the vehicle physics and course design. But with THQ taking the reins from Atari for the sequel, all realism has been thrown out of the window in favour of 'scenes of fantasy' (as the disclaimer at the start of the game warns). What we now have is a distinctly arcadey racer packed with a selection of 'wacky' characters from the original, 'fantastic' courses and 'thrilling' stunts. 'Great'.

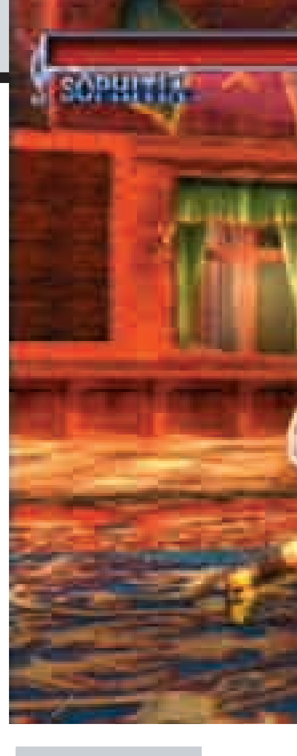
To be fair, the game's not actually that bad. Sure, it's packed with virtually every videogame stereotype (from cookie-cutter characters – token American, Brit, Irishman and so on – to obvious track settings such as ice, jungle and even a haunted castle) and doesn't do much over most other water-based race games, but for what it is, that's no bad thing. What you're getting is a fast and relatively action-packed water-based arcade racer that's more wacky than something like *Wave Race: Blue Storm* and has stupidly over-the-top stunts but still enough realism in terms of the physics to make it worth a look over other 'normal' racing titles. There are also plenty of unlockable secrets (from new tracks, vehicles and modes to a plethora of secret, even kookier characters) to keep you busy for ages, which again isn't bad, especially since opening them means mastering all the different track styles and difficulties in order to earn enough points.

Unfortunately, while all this may look good on paper (especially when compared to the original), the fact remains that *Splashdown* is just above middle-of-the-road when it comes to the gameplay. It's fun but not groundbreaking, and enjoyable but not absorbing enough to keep you playing for more than a few hours at a time. Three words? It's a renter – simple as that.



VERDICT 6/10
RATHER BY-THE-NUMBERS, BUT STILL A LAUGH









OKAY, WE'RE CONFUSED – HOW CAN YOU MAKE A SIMPLE CONVERSION WORSE?

SOUL CALIBUR II

DETAILS




FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts (PS2/Xb), Nintendo (GC)

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
26 September

PLAYERS
1-2

Six months is a long time in gaming – enough time for publishers to announce a whole new range of games or developers to polish an average game into a diamond. Sadly, a six-month wait is also agony for gamers, particularly when the game you want is already out in Japan and you have to sit around like a lemon waiting for the PAL release. But at least you can be assured that eventually you'll get the same quality title – unless something happens to mess up the PAL release, of course. But that would never happen… would it?

Don't get us wrong, we haven't suddenly decided that *Soul Calibur II* isn't all it's cracked up to be although, obviously, you could argue that point if you're willing to be petty enough and have a unhealthy passion for the earlier games in the series. However, we have to say that we're slightly concerned about a number of really annoying little things that stand out as being inferior to the Japanese release; things that are noticeable even if you're a *Soul Calibur II* virgin. Even worse, these are things that could have been fixed relatively easily – particularly since Namco has had six months to sort them out.

But first, the good news. Just as the hype suggests, *Soul Calibur II* is a decent weapon-based beat-'em-up which has no equal on any of the current consoles. Although there are certainly enough similarities to say that it's more of an upgrade of the Dreamcast original rather than a full-blown sequel, that doesn't stop it from offering everything a good 3D beat-'em-up should have – plenty of moves, loads of flashy effects and more weapons than you can shake a pointy stick at. Namco has played it very cagily by improving on

TEKKEN 4



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SOUL CALIBUR II (IMPORT)

FAQs

Q. SOUL CALIBUR 1.5?
Pretty much, although that's not exactly terrible. The original game was great (although not as good as *Soul Blade*), so having just more of the same isn't all that bad. Well, sort of.

Q. CHEAP AS CHIPS?
If you're talking about the enemy AI, then yes; in comparison to the 'harsh but fair' difficulty of the import version, the PAL opponents fight as dirty as the day is long.

Q. SPRECHEN SIE ENGLISCH?
Unfortunately so, and the English voices are as uninspiring as you would expect – though, thankfully, you do have the option of putting them back to the original Japanese.



Ivy and her extendable Whip-Blade are back, although this time she appears to have earned herself a whole new streak of viciousness – some of her moves are just plain nasty.



The new backgrounds are nice, but some (like the Windmill stage) are a bit too complex for their own good and end up providing nothing but extra slowdown to the proceedings.



Despite having her lookalike Cassandra available for selection, we still prefer to have Sophitia fight our battles for us any day of the week.



One of the few original new characters, Raphael, is fast and fancy – his rapier might not dish out that much damage, but he's got the moves to run circles around most of the other characters combined.



every single element of the original (from backgrounds and characters, through to the improved Weapon Master mode) rather than trying anything drastically new that could deter the fans. This, as you might expect, is mostly a good thing, although we can't help but think that some decent original characters rather than rehashes of old ones (and the awful Necrid) wouldn't have gone amiss.

However, the PAL version of *Soul Calibur II* has its own share of problems to add to the ones that afflicted the import version. But unlike the very minor import issues such as slight clipping on the characters or some slowdown, these make more of a difference to the experience the game offers. This is mainly because they feature in other areas that have supposedly been 'improved' for the PAL release, but instead they just smack of laziness. The big sticking point for us has to be your opponents' AI – after complaints that the game was too easy for Japanese gamers, Namco has clearly done its best to enhance the difficulty. The result is, to be frank, a mess – computer opponents now just use a combination of constant blocking, impossible side-steps, unbalanced power attacks and unblockable ground strikes to dominate each fight, which makes playing alone far less enjoyable than it should be.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

THREE'S A CROWD: You'll have to decide which of the three unique version characters you like best.

UP IN ARMS: The *Soul Calibur* series is still one of the few weapons-based beat-'em-ups around today.

Add to that the obviously last-minute decision to include three previously unavailable characters (minus much-needed and easily-put-together moves lists, that is) and it all makes for some poor choices on Namco's part. Even something as obvious as the character voices gives us cause for concern – not only are the English voices pretty average throughout, but many of the speech samples end up cutting each other off during particularly intense battles, making the whole thing seem rather scrappy. There is, however, the option to restore the original Japanese voices (at last, something to be thankful for).

Of course, being practically uncontested in its field means that *Soul Calibur II* automatically becomes the leader of the pack and, to be fair, it's still a very enjoyable game when played against friends. However, it's because of those extra flaws that we feel compelled to bring the score down a notch. Considering this should have been a simple conversion, it's just not acceptable from a developer as experienced as this.



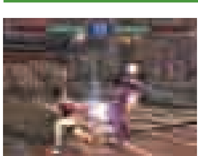
VERDICT 7/10

STILL ENJOYABLE, BUT WHY ALL THE EXTRA FLAWS?

AN OLDIE, BUT A BADDIE

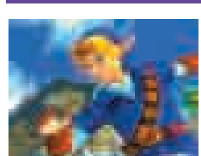
As you work your way through the Weapon Master mode, you'll meet up with some enemies that might appear strangely familiar to anyone who's played the first *Soul Calibur*. It certainly takes a genius to pick Lizardman out of a crowd, and only the more observant amongst you will spot that Berserker and Assassin were also characters in the original, albeit it in the guises of Rock and Hwang respectively. When we first played the import version, we were slightly gutted that these three couldn't be unlocked as playable characters, so you can imagine our surprise when that suddenly changed for the PAL release. Of course, you can also imagine our dismay when we discovered that none of them had move lists – a real pain when, in order to learn how to play as someone, you need to know what they can do.

XBOX £39.99 26 SEPT



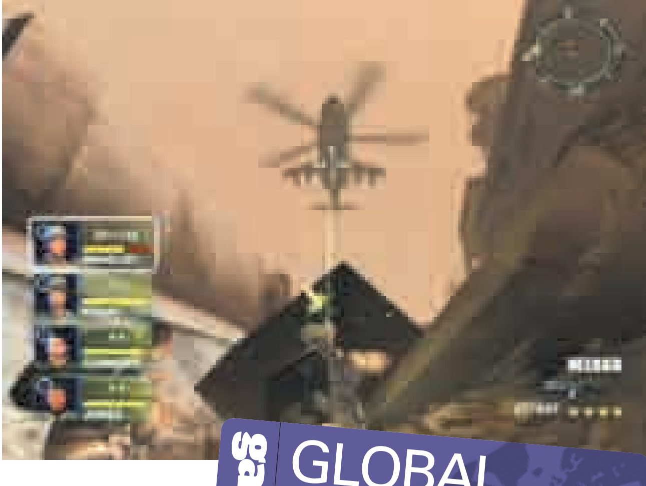
The Xbox version shines with some nice visual effects. Control is also solid, although there's no denying that Spawn is probably the worst of the three unique characters on offer.

GAMECUBE £39.99 26 SEPT



Possibly the best of the three when it comes to combining unique character choice, graphics and control – we'd take Link over Spawn or Heihachi any day of the week.





GLOBAL – games™

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

NO SHOW: Sadly, while games like *SOCOM* offer action against players the world over, *Conflict* is confined to a single console. Pivotal is working on online functionality, but we want it now, dammit.

PIVOTAL KEEPS THE CONFLICT COMING

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
SCi

DEVELOPER
Pivotal

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
September '03
(GC – November '03)

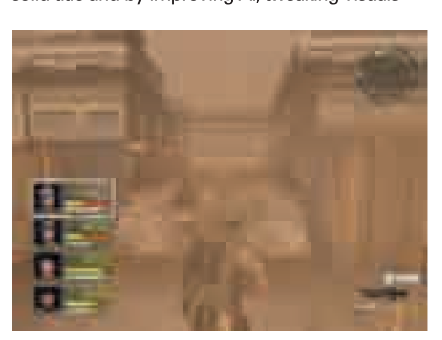
PLAYERS
1-2

We're sure we're not alone when we say that for a war-based title to be at all interesting in today's saturated market, it has to be something really quite special. The industry has seen so many generic 'man/squad with gun(s)' games that even heavily hyped releases like *Brute Force* can easily turn out to be woefully average or worse. As a result, though, franchises can often fare better – Joe Public is far more likely to pick up a game with a recognised title and, as such, *Conflict II* is set in good stead by its accomplished predecessor. How ironic, then, that familiarity is both its major selling point and its biggest letdown.

While we're normally keen to highlight the key differences that set a sequel apart from its predecessor, Pivotal has made this easy for us in that this is nigh-on identical to the first game. This isn't an entirely bad thing – the original was a good solid title and by improving AI, tweaking visuals and throwing in new weapons and effects, we're presented with an enjoyable experience that suffers from little more than familiarity. Sadly, the first game did have a tendency to get slightly repetitive so previous players may find some of this sequel's missions somewhat similar, though newcomers to the growing *Conflict* series should find it an impressive and absorbing experience despite a few technical problems.

As expected, *Conflict II* looks and sounds the part – for a PS2 title it throws around some great effects (even if these can knock down the frame-rate with annoyingly frequency). Settings have been made more varied to try to combat the repetition in the first game, and while you are theoretically given the freedom to tackle tasks in different ways, much of the more corridor-based level design doesn't allow this. Still, *Conflict II* has a few aces to play by way of co-operative play (among other things) which makes for some of the best moments of the game.

Ultimately, this offers little over the first *Desert Storm* other than a new campaign and several engine tweaks but given the game's setting, there's precious little more you could ask of it. Nothing groundbreaking, but if it's fun with guns you're after then few current squad-based titles provide it better than this.



It may not look like much, but the sandstorm effects look really rather lovely in motion.

VERDICT 7/10
MORE OF THE SAME BUT STILL GOOD FUN

BRUTE FORCE

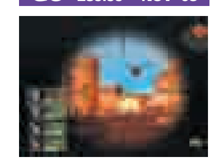
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



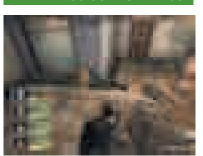
CONFLICT DESERT STORM

GC £39.99 NOV '03



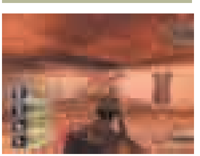
A little way off yet but if this is anything like the last game, the GameCube version could outshine all others. We'll have to wait and see but our fingers remain crossed…

XB £39.99 SEPT '03

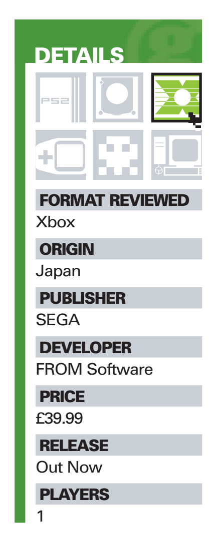


Offering slightly improved visuals and four-player co-operative potential, the Xbox version would be our version of choice if the game hadn't so clearly been designed with the PS2 pad in mind.

PC £29.99 SEPT '04



The trade-off for the obviously classy visuals is that there's no form of multiplayer whatsoever – a real shame considering this is one of *Conflict*'s biggest strengths



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
FROM Software

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS

GHOST STORIES AND ANCIENT MYTHS COME TO LIFE…

It's easy to accuse developers of reaching for the DVD shelf when trying to find inspiration for their latest videogame. However, with bullet-time and convoluted storylines around every digital corner, it's so hard not to. For that reason alone then, we're thankful that slash-'em-up *Otogi: Myth Of Demons* shuns Hollywood in favour of a far richer and more interesting resource pool closer home – the world of the Japanese spook story.

Otogi's roots are evident through the game, which explores ancient ghost fables by taking you from misty shipwrecks to floating islands. Eastern folklore also serves as the inspiration for the army of supernatural demons and ghouls throughout, all fastidiously designed and bringing the settings to life. The sound is unusually quiet, consisting mostly of ghostly bell chimes, only coming to life when battle begins. It's wonderfully atmospheric and gives *Otogi* a distinct, mystical feel that's almost as important as the gameplay.

Even better, your character, Raikoh, is also somewhat ethereal – he can double jump, air dash and float to the ground, which can be combined with sword slashes for a simple-but-satisfying combat system. It's fortunate that the basics of fighting are easy to grasp, as Raikoh will often find himself outnumbered – add plenty of destructible scenery and all the ingredients are there for mayhem and carnage. Despite being based around ghost stories, this certainly isn't a survival horror game, as you'll realise when you smash yet another apparition through a wall.

Unfortunately, the main problem is that *Otogi* tends to repeat itself. There are some attempts to keep the objectives diverse (keeping a ship afloat, destroying a water tower and so on) but the core gameplay remains the same – hack and slash until you win. Even with the options to buy new weapons and level up between stages, it doesn't provide the depth that's needed. But *Otogi* should be applauded for trying something different. Anyone looking for a new gaming experience won't be too disappointed.



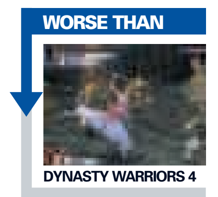
VERDICT 6/10
A MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, HAMPERED BY REPETITION

CHAOS LEGION

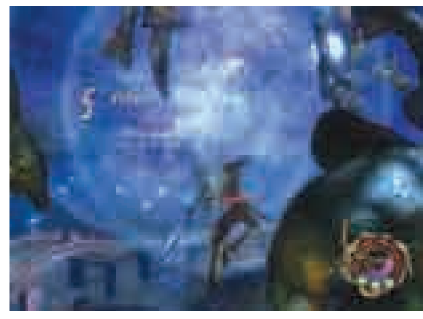


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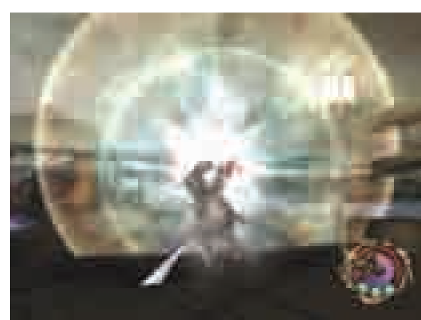
WORSE THAN



DYNASTY WARRIORS 4



Learning how to dash in the air and stay there is a key part of mastering the more stylish and effective combos.



Fighting on the ground is every bit as effective as aerial combat, although it doesn't feel quite as rewarding.



Most things in the game be destroyed; for example, that ship won't be able to withstand an enemy smacked into its side…

games™ FINGERPRINT

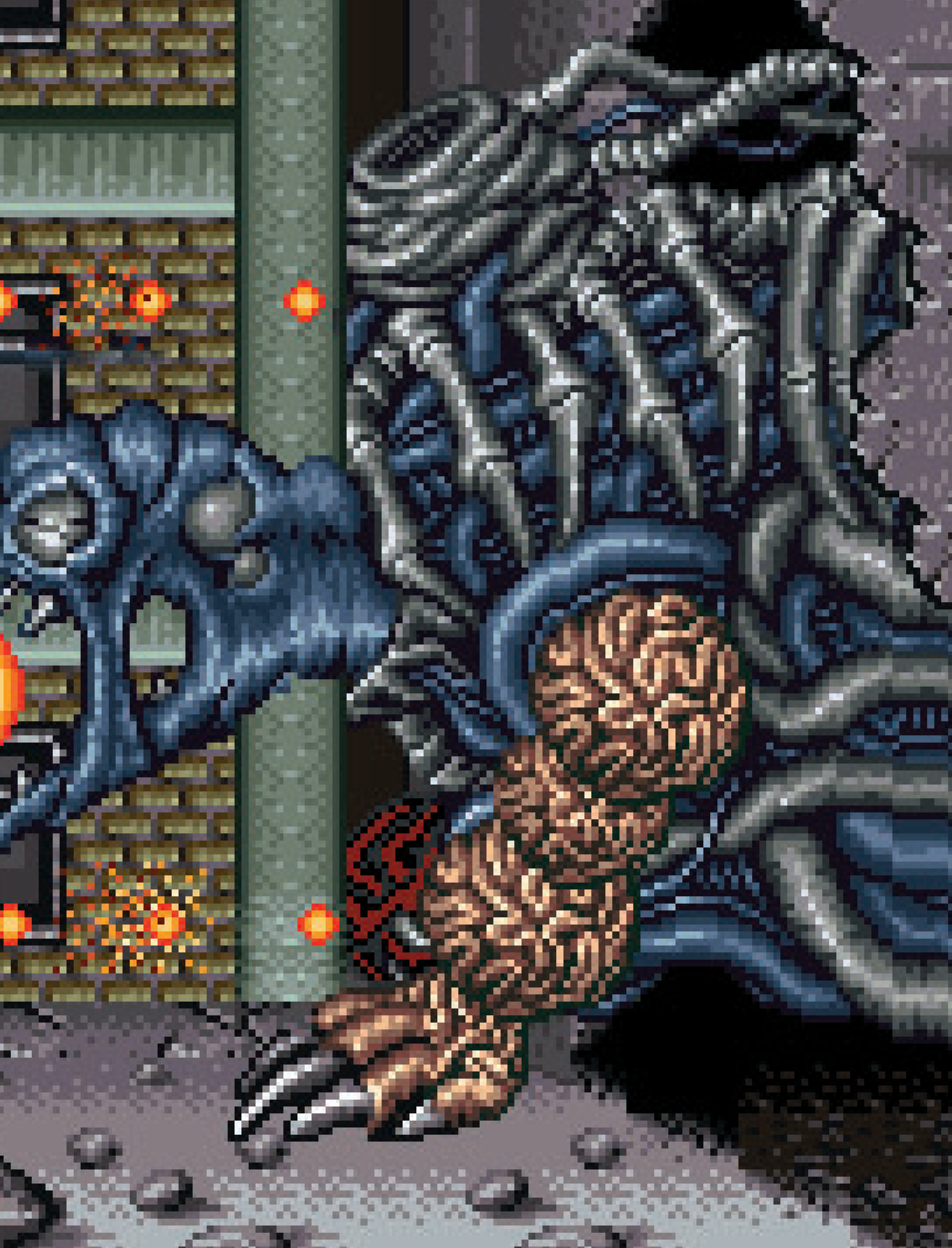
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HANGTIME: Raikoh can fight in the air, opening up some impressive aerial hand-to-hand combos

APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION: Nearly all the peripheral scenery can be destroyed.



That ain't no kind of turtle I've ever seen… **Contra III: The Alien Wars SNES [Konami] 1992**




eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.10 SEPTEMBER 2003
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
THE GREATEST RETRO GAME EVER MADE!
Anyone fancy a game of Pong?
INSIDE!
WHY DON'T THEY REMAKE...
NiGHTS
The classic SEGA Saturn game that proved that originality was alive and well… even if it was only in our dreams!
THIS ISSUE:
THIS MONTH IN 1983 Coleco makes a move into the computer industry
MORTAL KOMBAT Was this game really worthy of all the hype it generated?
GRAFTGOLD We go behind the scenes with the unsung British developer
PLUS! 3DO – A CONSOLE BEFORE ITS TIME!

RETRO NEWS

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING...

Apparently the Dreamcast is dead. Hardware production was halted a while back and no new games are released here in the UK (though it isn't difficult to find second-hand machines). However, over in Japan it's quite a different story; production of the hardware may have ceased there too, but games are still released on a regular basis – some of which make it into the multiformat charts.

Of course, gaming culture in Japan is a little different from Europe and the US in that it's been part of everyday life there for much longer. Being that bit more mature, it seems that Japan's industry is far more forgiving of poor console sales, providing that the system itself offers the developer a decent working environment. Just look at the GameCube – while European stores are clearing out their Nintendo games, shops in Japan are awaiting a tidal wave of quality GameCube titles.

With that in mind, then, it perhaps isn't too surprising that a handful of new Japanese titles have just been announced for both the Dreamcast and SNK's 12-year-old Neo-Geo home system...

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

CHAOS COMES HOME

SNK Playmore confirms console translations of its new fighter

With SNK Playmore's latest creation, *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos*, running on the Neo-Geo MVS arcade board, it was always a possibility that a conversion would find its way to the Neo-Geo home system. Aside from one or two memory issues, the porting process would be relatively painless seeing as the architecture is nigh-on identical, though it was thought that such a move simply might not be financially viable.

Well, amazingly, the company has confirmed that an AES conversion will arrive at the beginning of October, priced at ¥39,800 (approximately £205). No additional features have been confirmed at the time of writing, and judging by the enormous amount of memory required for the main game, it's unlikely that too much more will be added on top of the standard arcade code.

However, for anyone who can't afford to shell out upwards of £200 for the game, SNK Playmore has also confirmed that PS2 and Xbox versions of the game are in the works and will be released in the New Year. Hopefully, these will include bonus features.





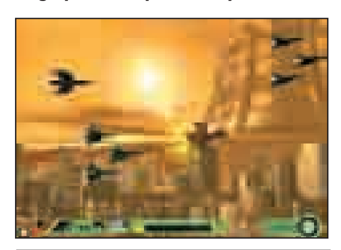


▲ Still hanging onto that trusty Neo-Geo home system? Don't let go yet because you'll be getting a dose of *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos* in the near future. You'll need to take out a loan first, though...

DREAM ON

Although the Dreamcast is still receiving new software titles in Japan, hard-core gamers have been particularly excited by the recent announcement of *Border Down* – and old-school shoot-'em-up from G-Rev. Similar to Treasure's *Ikaruga*, the game was initially released on the SEGA Naomi arcade board last year and features a blend of polygons and 2D parallax scrolling backgrounds to create a pseudo 3D look.

Launching on 25 September in Japan, lucky gamers will have the opportunity to pick up a limited number of *Border Down* mousemats and soundtrack CDs when they buy the Dreamcast version of the game. Expect to be seeing copies of *Border Down*, along with the limited edition merchandise, appearing on eBay at hugely inflated prices very soon.



▲ Expect Japanese Dreamcast owners to snap up *Border Down* – it's like *Ikaruga* only sideways...

High Spirits

Samurai Shodown rises from the grave

No sooner has *SVC Chaos* hit Japanese arcades and SNK Playmore has already confirmed its next project – *Samurai Spirits Zero* (*Samurai Shodown Zero* in the West). Again running on the Neo-Geo MVS arcade board, this latest instalment in the *Samurai Spirits* series is set to include 24 fighters, as well as a completely revamped control system.

This time around, Hard Slash is activated by pressing Weak and Medium Slash simultaneously, freeing up a button for a new action called Meditation. Using this in conjunction with other moves enables brand new abilities such as Enlightenment – a mode in which move combinations are carried out in slow motion. *Samurai Spirits Zero* is expected to hit Japanese arcades this autumn.



▲ *Samurai Spirits Zero* will have new fighters.

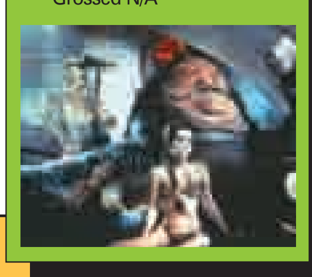
This Month In 1983



Ah, 1983 – the year when the Jedi returned, Mario Bros made its debut in arcades and Bonnie Tyler went to number one with Total Eclipse Of The Heart. Twenty years on, Star Wars and Mario are still going strong, but where's our Bonnie?

GREAT MOVIES IN 1983 (AMERICA)

1. **Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi**
   Grossed $309,125,409
2. **Flashdance**
   Grossed $94,900,000
3. **Octopussy**
   Grossed $67,900,000
4. **Superman III**
   Grossed $60,000,000
5. **Never Say Never Again**
   Grossed $55,500,000
6. **The Dead Zone**
   Grossed $20,766,000
7. **Monty Python's The Meaning Of Life**
   Grossed $12,565,000
8. **The Man With Two Brains**
   Grossed $10,100,000
9. **Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence**
   Grossed N/A
10. **Krull**
    Grossed N/A



UK CHARTS FOR SEPT 1983

1. **Red Red Wine**
   UB40
2. **Wings Of A Dove**
   Madness
3. **Tonight I Celebrate My Love**
   Peabo Bryson & Roberta Flack
4. **What Am I Gonna Do**
   Rod Stewart
5. **Mama**
   Genesis
6. **Walking In The Rain**
   Modern Romance
7. **Give It Up**
   KC & The Sunshine Band
8. **The Sun Goes Down (Living It Up)**
   Level 42
9. **Karma Chameleon**
   Culture Club
10. **Gold**
    Spandau Ballet



GAMING NEWS SEPT 83

The FCC says okay to Adam

It was this month in 1983 that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) gave Coleco the go ahead to start producing its Z80-based home computer, the Adam. Coleco had released a popular games console called the Colecovision just over a year previously, and saw the Adam as the next step in its business plan. While consoles were certainly popular with children, it was thought that parents would more readily spend money on a computer that could also be used for schoolwork. Unfortunately, things wouldn't run as smoothly as planned.

The system had been unveiled at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in June 1983 and was expected to launch that August for $600 (£370). Unfortunately, a number of unforeseen problems with production meant that the manufacturing costs were slowly rising, while the industry was becoming disheartened by the delays. By September, however, the press, along with a handful of financial advisers, were invited to the Coleco headquarters to witness the hardware coming off the production line. The event itself was successful enough, though further problems meant that the launch was delayed until October, when just 400,000 of the planned 500,000 units were ready.



▶ Good for games *and* schoolwork. Yeah, right…

Eventually going on sale at $700 (£430), the Adam launched in the third week of October and came packaged with a tape drive, keyboard and daisywheel printer. Interestingly, the system was compatible with existing Colecovision game tapes and cartridges, though it was its built-in word processing software that attracted consumers. Unfortunately, the market was in a poor state during 1983, and by the end of the year just 100,000 units had been sold.

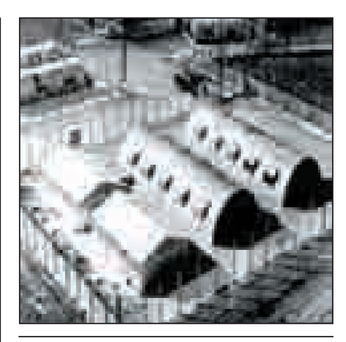
Coleco continued to support the Adam throughout 1984, though sales remained unspectacular. This, combined with a huge number of faulty machines, saw the company making a loss of $80 million (£50 million), and by the end of 1984, on the verge of bankruptcy, the company pulled out of the computer games industry altogether.

WORLD NEWS

MASSIVE MAZE BREAK OUT

On 25 September 1983, 38 prisoners escaped from the Maze high-security jail near Lisburn, Northern Ireland. Led by Dermot Finucane, the inmates used smuggled knives and guns against staff before driving to the main gate in a stolen food lorry. One prison officer was killed during the break out, while another was hospitalised with a gunshot wound to the head.

A massive police search was initiated immediately and 19 of the escapees were recaptured within a few days of the incident. Another eight were located over the next nine years (three of whom were killed in ambushes), but the remaining 11 have never been found. The Maze was closed in September 2000 and the remaining prisoners were transferred to other jails.



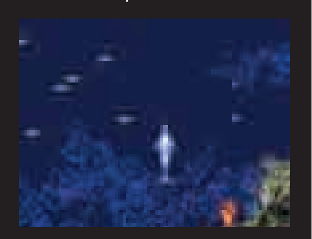
▶ The infamous Maze prison has now been closed.

THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

Just a few of the classic retro titles that have been blistering our thumbs this month…

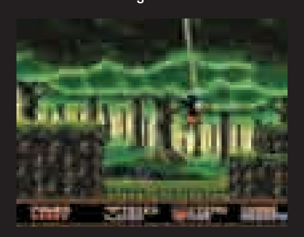
ECCO THE DOLPHIN

With Appaloosa unveiling its new shark game, *Sole Predator*, this month, we thought we'd revisit the original *Ecco* game. And it's still looking good aft er all these years.



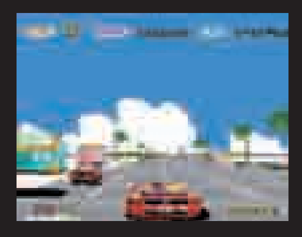
CASTLE OF ILLUSION

Although it's far too short and easy, playing *Castle Of Illusion* this month reminded us of just how pure and inoffensive videogames could be.



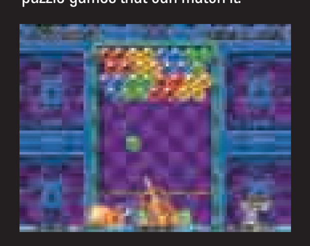
OUT RUN

Yu Suzuki and his team are going to have to work hard if they want *Out Run 2* to better the original arcade game – it's damn fast and silky smooth.



BUST-A-MOVE

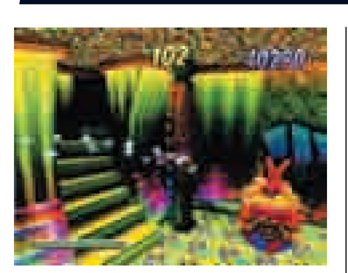
This is one game that spawned far too many pointless sequels. As a standalone title though, there are few puzzle games that can match it.



Why Don't They Remake?



N·I·G·H·T·S I·N·T·O D·R·E·A·M·S



Released: **1996**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **Sonic Team**
Format: **Saturn**

One title that we'd love to see remake is *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, Sonic Team's bizarre Saturn action adventure game. The game takes place in the surreal realm of Nightopia, in which the laws of physics don't apply. Playing as either Elliot or Claris (two human children who possess the spiritual essence of courage), your Ideyas (coloured orbs representing hope, purity, courage and so on) are taken by Nightmarians. Luckily, by entering the Ideya Palace it's possible to transform into Nights – jester-like creatures that can fly. Once in this guise, your aim is simply to collect 20 blue chips from around the level then take them to the Ideya Capture to destroy it within the time limit. Confused? Despite the somewhat complex background story, *NiGHTS* is actually a lot of fun.

The problem with *NiGHTS*, of course, was that as a SEGA Saturn game it was largely ignored by most of the Western gaming community – a factor that almost certainly affected SEGA's decision not to make a follow-up. Why spend time and money developing a game that could well be ignored twice? And yet a



NiGHTS remake has been rumoured for months now, though so far SEGA won't confirm or deny this. With the company currently undergoing an internal restructure, the chances are that such a project could well be announced in the coming months.

Reports from Japan suggest that part of this restructure will see Sonic Team merging with UGA, the team behind the psychedelic rhythm-based shoot-'em-up *Rez*. If this does go ahead, we could see the rise of one of the most creative development studios around – surely the perfect team to create a new *NiGHTS* game?

SNOW LAUGHING MATTER

SONIC TEAM'S LIMITED EDITION CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Although SEGA has had to tighten its belt recently, there was a time when it would release all sorts of quirky merchandise for its Japanese fans. In November 1996, Sonic Team launched *Christmas NiGHTS* – a shorter, graphically rearranged version of the main game that rewarded players with bonus prizes for finishing it. As only a few discs were released, *Christmas NiGHTS* is now quite sought-after.



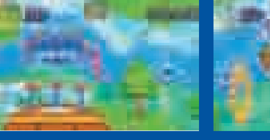
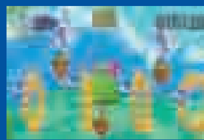
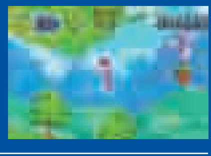
…next best thing

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE: EPISODE I & II

Although it wasn't a complete game, a Game Boy Advance version of *NiGHTS Into Dreams* was available to download from the GameCube version of *Phantasy Star Online*.

Replacing all the polygons with sprites and 2D side-scrolling layers, GBA *NiGHTS* mimicked the Saturn game extremely closely, hinting that a handheld version of the game may have been in the pipeline.

Sadly, although GC *Phantasy Star Online* launched in America almost a year ago, SEGA still hasn't confirmed whether a full-length portable version of *NiGHTS* will ever be released.

▲ Even better than the real thing? Not quite, but we'd love to see a handheld version of *NiGHTS*.

Look Back in Anger

A complementary title to Capcom's Street Fighter series? Or merely an overly violent gore-fest aimed at 13 year olds?

Although most hard-core gamers continue to argue that *Street Fighter II* is the all-time king of beat-'em-ups, Midway's *Mortal Kombat* games have certainly received plenty of praise over the years. Launching in the arcades in 1991, it wasn't difficult to see why the original game provoked so much attention. From a visual standpoint it was certainly one of the more creative titles around – rather than hand-drawn sprites, the game featured digitised actors and martial arts experts, giving it a far more realistic look than other similar titles. Of course, this wasn't the first time such imagery had been used in a videogame – *Pit Fighter*, for example, which had launched two years previously, featured similarly styled visuals, though the overall effect was a little less refined.

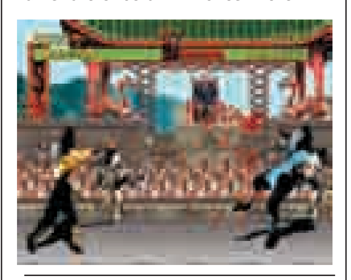
Aside from its graphics though, there was another thing for which *Mortal Kombat* became well-known – its shocking level of violence. Huge drops of crimson liquid would spurt from the characters whenever moves connected, while the infamous 'Death Moves' would see heads ripped off with the spines still attached and pumping hearts torn out of chests. Then, of course, there was the pit full of spikes in which unlucky losers would often find themselves impaled amongst decapitated heads and rotting corpses. Unsurprisingly, such levels of graphic violence resulted in *Mortal Kombat* getting more than its fair share of column inches in the tabloid press, and the game soon became a household name.



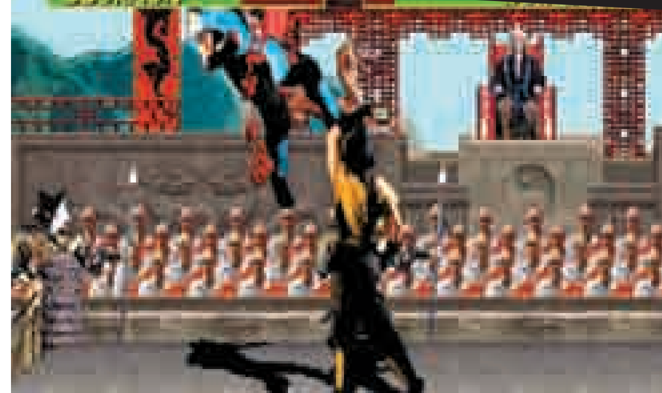
▲ Take out the blood and the game's even worse.



▲ Ooh, controversial. Yet oddly unsatisfying.



▲ You want blood? You got it. Buckets of the stuff.



▲ "A pint? That's nearly an armful" etc…

But underneath all the gore and showiness it's debatable whether or not Midway's creation offered a gaming experience to match its closest rival, *Street Fighter II*. While Capcom's game featured a range of balanced fighters, each with a selection of skill-based special moves and combos, *Mortal Kombat* relied far more heavily on quick jabs and cheesy leg sweeps. Of course, each of the characters had their own list of moves, though they tended to range from being far too powerful to utterly pointless.

A further blow came in the form of the SNES version, in which all the blood and most of the gore had been removed to appease Nintendo (at the time the company was still very family orientated). Without its token violence, it was blatantly obvious just how shallow *Mortal Kombat* really was; next to the sublime console conversion of *Street Fighter II Turbo* there really didn't seem to be an awful lot to master. Still, that didn't stop Midway from creating more than half a dozen sequels and spin-offs.



LAST MONTH'S AMSTRAD CPC SCREENSHOTS

Too young to remember the Amstrad CPC 464? Don't worry, at least you'll know what last month's games were…

FIRST ROW
- Daley Thompson's Decathlon
- Double Dragon
- Rampage
- Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja
- Little Computer People
- Hammer Boy
- Harvey Headbanger
- Fernandez Must Die
- Dan Dare 3: The Escape
- Dungeons, Amethysts, Alchemists 'n' Everythin'

SECOND ROW
- Beyond The Ice Palace
- Renegade
- BMX Simulator
- Spy Vs Spy II: The Island Caper
- Solomon's Key
- Head Over Heels
- Krystal Kingdom Dizzy
- Run The Gauntlet
- Mickey Mouse
- Power Drift

THIRD ROW
- Operation Wolf
- Extreme
- Killerball
- Shockway Rider
- Off Shore Warrior
- Commando
- Gauntlet
- Feud
- Robocop
- Nebulus

FOURTH ROW
- Bobo
- Cybernoid
- Cauldron
- P-47: The Freedom Fighter
- The Eidolon
- Jack The Nipper
- Exolon
- Trantor
- Batman
- Roland On The Ropes

FIFTH ROW
- By Fair Means Or By Foul
- Ikari Warriors
- Ball Bearing
- Ninja Scooter Simulator
- North And South
- Golden Axe
- Thundercats
- The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad
- Platoon
- Spindizzy

SIXTH ROW
- Everyone's A Wally
- Castle Master
- Oh Mummy
- APB
- SAS Combat Simulator
- First Past The Post
- Dominator
- Eliminator
- Rick Dangerous
- Fruit Machine Simulator

SEVENTH ROW
- After The War
- Fantastic Voyage
- Arkanoid: Revenge Of Doh
- Wonderboy
- Prince Of Persia
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles
- Chase HQ
- The Trap Door
- Space Harrier
- Klax

EIGHTH ROW
- Solomon's Key
- Afterburner
- Rainbow Islands
- Auf Wiedersehen Monty
- Chicken Chase
- Savage
- The Sentinel
- Garfield: Big Fat Hairy Deal
- Obliterator
- Escape From Singe's Castle



STAR GAMES

Some films are made into games, but some games get to star in the movies. This month we take a look at Mallrats and Chasing Amy – two memorable movies in which director Kevin Smith cast his favourite SEGA Hockey games.

Unlikely candidates as they may seem, this month's Oscar nominees come in the form of *All Star Hockey* on the SEGA Saturn and *NHLPA '93* on the SEGA Mega Drive. Under the direction of self-proclaimed hockey fan Kevin Smith (who appears in many of his movies as Silent Bob), SEGA's *All Star Hockey* game on the Saturn had its moment of glory in one of the pivotal scenes of *Mallrats*.

Near to the beginning of the movie, main man Brodie (Jason Lee) gets dumped by his girlfriend while lovingly clutching a SEGA Saturn controller in his sweaty palms. His addiction to playing *All Star Hockey* is a huge factor in the breakdown of his relationship (after all, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned for SEGA) and thus the storyline for the whole movie is set in motion.

Movie Trivia

FACT: Kevin Smith regularly includes hockey references in his movies – and it's always the Hartford Whalers that are the featured team.

GOOF: Despite Brodie insisting that it's the middle of the second half of his hockey game in *Mallrats* there are actually just a few seconds left on the clock. Or, er, so we've been told. By geeks.



▲ Holden and Banky found that *NHLPA* was an unlikely catalyst for sexual exploration. Result.

Our second star game award this month goes to *NHLPA '93* on the Mega Drive, thanks to its wonderful performance in *Chasing Amy* (also directed by Kevin Smith). The game's big scene sparks off a debate about homosexuality, during which Holden McNeil (Ben Affleck) admits that he's in love with his lesbian friend, Alyssa Jones (Joey Lauren Adams).



Amazingly, *NHLPA* went through no formal acting training for the part, but has since had to deal with being typecast as a 'gay' game… whatever that might be.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



BOB THE FISH - EARTHWORM JIM 2

When the first game in the series had pitted our invertebrate hero against such unlikely felons as a bounty-hunting crow, a heap of rubbish and an evil cat named Evil, we weren't expecting anything close to sanity from the sequel.

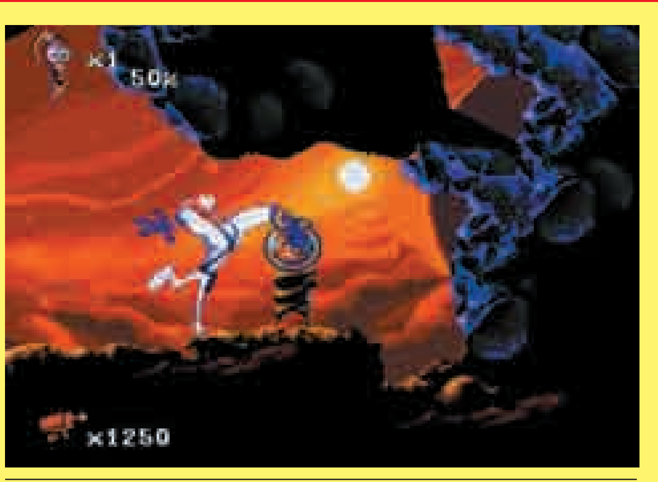
Suffice to say, *Earthworm Jim 2* exceeded all our expectations, confronting the player with a boss battle so absolutely farcical that no arch-enemy has since come close. One of the tougher bosses in the first game, Bob the Fish, returns at the end of the first level to continue his wave of finned tyranny, but this time around let's just say Bob isn't such a threat…



Equipped with his trademark Power Suit, Jim negotiates the usual menagerie of beasties – as well as a horde of stairlift-ridden old ladies and Bob's many guardians – to reach the end of the opening stage only to find his scaly foe lying in wait, literally a fish out of water. Well, almost.

Protected by a mere glass sphere and several litres of water, the gilled villain doesn't stand a chance against our annelid hero. No fancy button combos or tricky patterns here – after the huge 'Fight!' prompt, Jim simply sidles up to the fishbowl and plunges his hand into the liquid, snagging the wicked fish and swiftly swallows him whole.

Simple? Yes. Anticlimactic? Perhaps. But in terms of surreal ingenuity, very little comes close to this mismatch of the century.



▲ Do worms eat fish? Hell, they do now. And they do it with *such* style.



Battlezone (Atari 2600, 5200) Atari, 1983 – American advertisement



3DO INTERACTIVE MULTIPLAYER

DESCRIBED BY ITS CREATOR AS "MORE STIMULATING TO THE HUMAN MIND THAN ANY NEW TECHNOLOGY SINCE PRINTING", THE 3DO LOOKED SET TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING. SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU: ARM60 32-bit RISC CPU
CPU Speed: 12.5Mhz
Memory: DRAM – 2MB
VRAM – 1MB
Resolution: 640x480
GPU: 2 x graphics animation co-processors
GPU Speed: 25Mhz
GPU Capabilities: 20,000 polygons per second
Texture mapping
Transparency
Sprite scaling effects (enlargement, rotation etc.)
Sound: Custom 16-bit digital signal processor (25Mhz)
32 channels
44.1Khz sampling rate
Input/Output Composite video, S-Video RF
Other: Double-speed CD-Rom drive
32KB battery back-up memory for game saves
Singular controller port
Audio CD & CD-G compatible
Photo-CD compatible

Launched in the US in October 1993, the 3DO Interactive Multiplayer looked set to be a sure-fire hit. The machine was the collaborative work of seven respectable electronics companies including Matsushita (aka Panasonic), and with EA founder William 'Trip' Hawkins at the helm, it seemed the system couldn't fail. However, it soon became clear that there were several major factors that would prevent the 3DO from ever achieving the sort of success of which it was theoretically capable.

The $700 (£442) price tag immediately deterred most potential buyers, irrespective of what games were on the machine and how many extra functions were available. Two further problems came in the form of SEGA and Sony, which were both in the process of developing more powerful consoles for release a year later. This had a knock-on effect with regards to third-party software developers, many of whom steered clear of the 3DO in favour of the two forthcoming Japanese systems. Of course, you could hardly blame them for being cautious – the machine was launched at a time when developers around the world were struggling to stay afloat.

Despite facing such difficulties, the 3DO still played an important role in gaming history. Not only did it bridge the gap between the demise of 2D and the introduction of 3D, but it was also a fairly accurate indication of where the console industry would go in the future. Although it seemed misguided at the time, the creation of a multi-function entertainment system (that was not only compatible with games but also with audio, photo and video CDs) is like the consoles of today featuring DVD movie playback and network gaming.

"WHY I LOVE THE 3DO"

Selling my American SNES (with 40 classic games) in order to buy an imported 3DO seemed like a good idea at the time, but we all make mistakes. Disappointed as I was though, spending Christmas day 1994 playing *The Need For Speed* and *Road Rash* is now a treasured memory that I'd be without had I not been such a mindless fool.

Keith Edwards

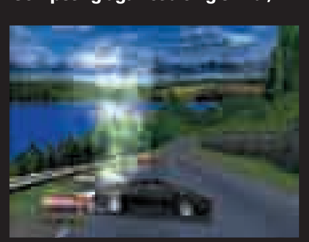
SIX OF THE BEST

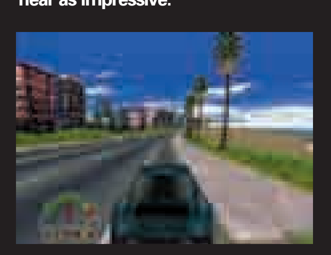
The machine may not have been the greatest success in the world, but it did have a few good games to its name

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Year: **1994**

Although additional 3D processing power has given racing games a boost in recent years, there are few titles that blend realism and fun as well as *The Need For Speed* did back in 1994. Competing against a single rival, the game wasn't particularly smooth or fast, but featured winding country roads, an astonishing draw distance and some of the most impressive car crashes seen in a videogame to date. Unfortunately, none of the follow-ups have been anywhere near as impressive.

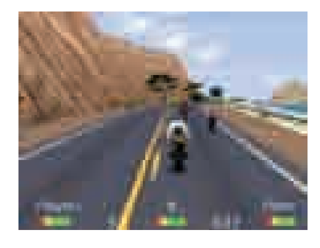


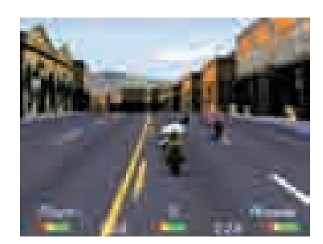


ROAD RASH

Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Year: **1994**

By using a mix of sprites and polygons, EA was able to keep 3DO *Road Rash* running fast and smoothly. Although the concept hadn't changed a great deal from the earlier Mega Drive games, this incarnation featured lengthier tracks as well as graphics that many described as 'photo realistic'. The game also featured licensed tracks by Soundgarden and Swervedriver, though hardware limitations meant that the machine couldn't play them during the races.





SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

Publisher: **Capcom**
Year: **1994**

Looking far more authentic than the SNES incarnation of *Super Street Fighter II*, 3DO *SSFII Turbo* featured practically all the animation frames from the original arcade game. It also boasted Qsound and remixed music tracks that people seemed to love or hate in equal numbers. Sadly, a lack of processor power meant that many of the parallax layers had been removed from the scrolling backgrounds, giving the game a flatter look than the coin-op version.

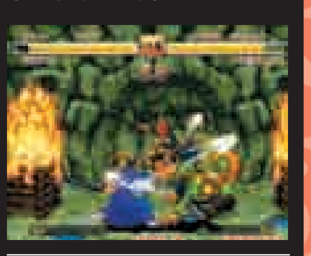


▲ Well, it's better than the SNES conversion, but it *is* on the 3DO. Can't have everything, eh?

SAMURAI SHODOWN

Publisher: **BMG**
Year: **1994**

Like Capcom's *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, 3DO *Samurai Shodown* looked closer to the original arcade game than any of the other console conversions. Unfortunately, the 3DO hardware wasn't well-suited to running complex 2D routines, and because all the scaling effects had been included along with all the animation the program didn't move things as smoothly as the Neo-Geo version. Thankfully, these drawbacks didn't affect the gameplay to any great extent.



▲ For an apparently all-powerful machine, the 3DO struggled with some visual effects.

RETURN FIRE

Publisher: **3DO**
Year: **1994**

Based around a simple 'capture the flag' theme, *Return Fire* was one of the few 3DO games that helped the format to attract a wider audience. Played from a bird's-eye point of view, a range of vehicles were on offer, including tanks and helicopters, each bringing a slightly different flavour to the experience. Best of all, the game featured a sublime two-player split-screen battle mode, which instantly gave *Return Fire* a longevity far beyond that of most similar titles.



▲ You fancy capturing some flags? You'll be wanting a play of *Return Fire* then…

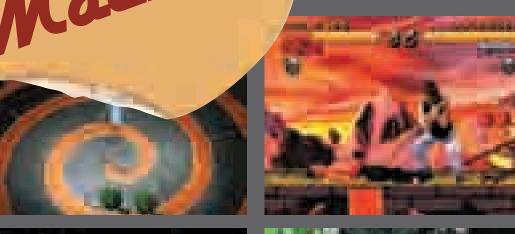
CRASH 'N BURN

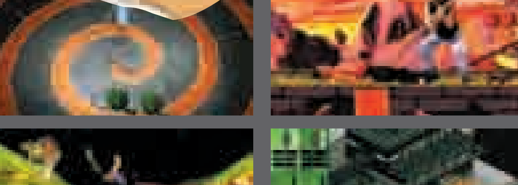
Publisher: **Crystal Dynamics**
Year: **1994**

Comparable to *Wipeout* on the PlayStation, *Crash 'N Burn* was a high-speed futuristic racer for the 3DO. Developed by Crystal Dynamics, the game suffered from short, uninspired tracks and iffy controls, though the slickness of the graphics engine was more than enough to generate public interest. For a while, *Crash 'N Burn* was packaged with the 3DO in America and the revenue generated gave Crystal Dynamics part of the funding to create its *Legacy Of Kain* adventure series.



▲ This was a fairly impressive racer but the tracks were nothing special.





Classic Machine

READY

3DO

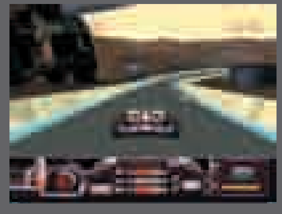
Panasonic

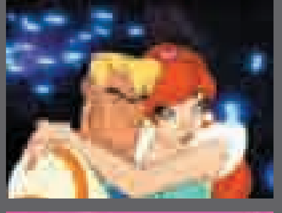
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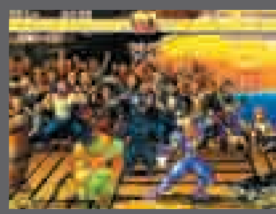
3DO INTERACTIVE MULTIPLAYER

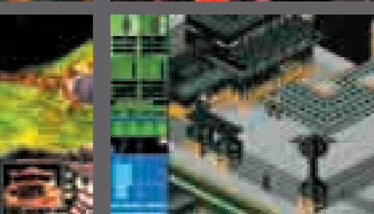
ACCESS

COMPACT DISC DIGITAL AUDIO

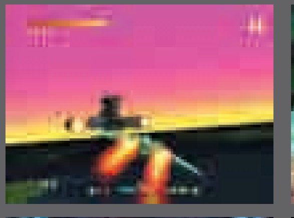




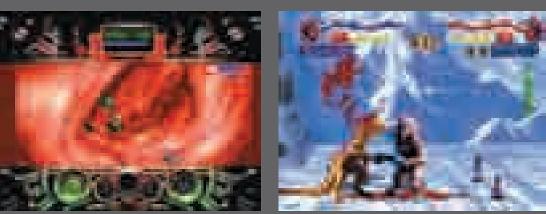


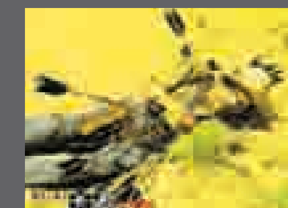


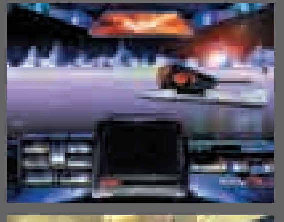


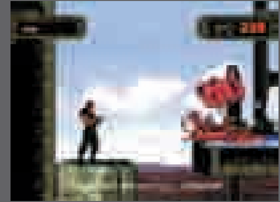


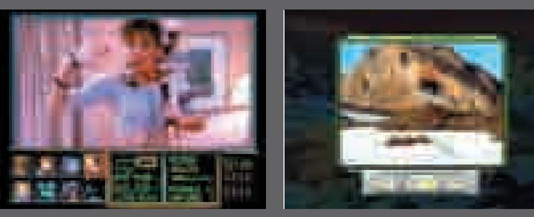


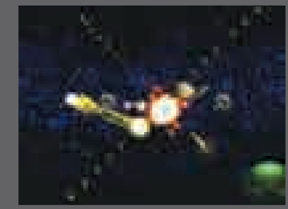


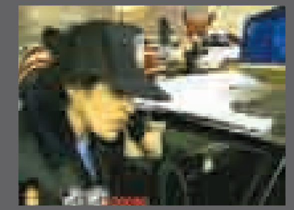




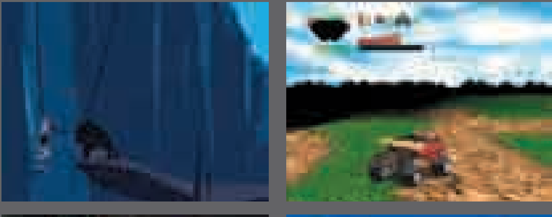


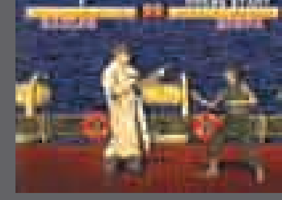






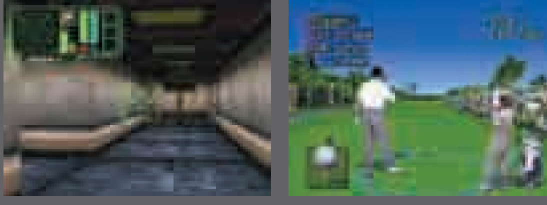




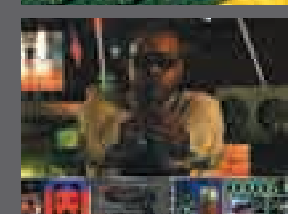




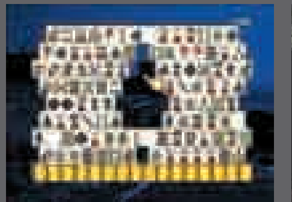




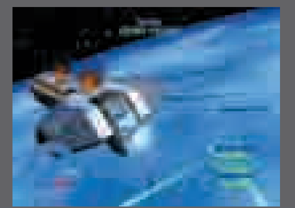




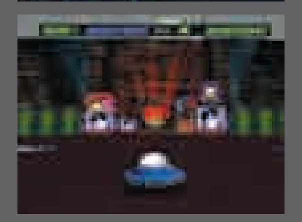






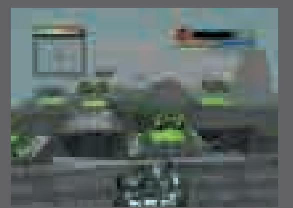






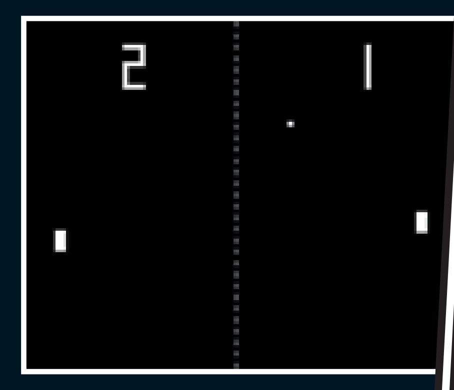












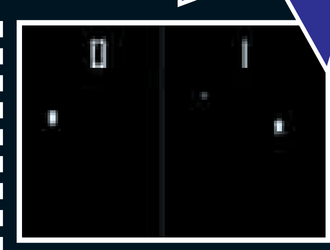


Though it may seem an obvious choice, Pong could be the greatest retro game of all time for the most unlikely reasons…

P•O•N•G



Format: **Arcade, Atari 2600, GBC, Macintosh, PC, PSone**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **In-House**
Price: **£Varies**
Release date: **1972**



▶ Looks aren't everything, particularly if you're *Pong*. Or a lonely ugly person.

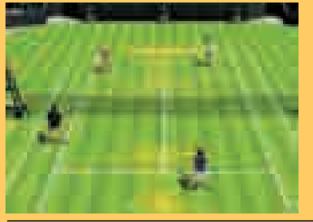
Released in November 1972, *Pong* truly was one of the first mass-market computer games, thanks to its simplistic yet thoroughly enjoyable gameplay. As perhaps the most famous coin-op of all time, you're probably aware that the aim was simply to keep a ball in play, much like tennis. This was achieved by moving a small deflector up and down your side of the screen by twisting a dial known as a paddle.

Contrary to popular belief though, *Pong* wasn't actually the first game to do this. Computer engineers had been creating basic interactive programs since the early Fifties, but the enormous manufacturing costs, combined with the unreliability of such early technology, had meant that general release simply wasn't an option. As the years passed, however, the technology gradually became more stable, and in 1958 an employee of the Brookhaven National Laboratories, Willy Higginbotham, created *Tennis For Two*. Practically identical to *Pong*, *Tennis For Two* was a simplistic and really rather abstract representation of a tennis match, designed to be played by two people. Enjoyable as it was, the system was only up and running for two years before it was dismantled and the parts reused for other projects.

It would be more than a decade before the technological advancements made during the Fifties would be used to create a general release amusement product, the first being *Computer Space*. Designed by Nolan Bushnell (who would later go on to produce *Pong*), the gameplay consisted of little more than blowing up UFOs in a rocket ship – a task which, for some reason, was a little too complicated for early gamers. The machine was a flop.

Pong and on and on…

Okay, so things have moved on since *Pong* was released in 1972, but have they really progressed that far? While new technology allows for all kinds of impressive new graphical capabilities, many games still rely on the winning formula of reflex-testing target hitting (even things like Air Hockey). And when you look at something like *Virtua Tennis*, you have to wonder if that's what Willy Higginbotham *meant* to make, but lacked the technology…





▶ Okay, they *look* different, but they're essentially *Pong* tarted up a bit. Kind of.

It was also during 1971 that Magnavox signed an agreement to manufacture the first home videogame console, the Odyssey. Developed during the Sixties under the name of Brown Box, the Odyssey was designed by 'the father of videogames', Ralph Baer, who pioneered gaming throughout the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies. The system eventually went on sale the same year that *Pong* was launched at a whopping $100 (approximately £62) and came packaged with six games, one of which was a simple tennis game. Interestingly, Bushnell had played the game at one of the preview showings of the Odyssey and was clearly influenced by it.

So why suggest that *Pong* could be the 'greatest retro game ever' if it merely copied other games that had gone before it? Well, the answer is purely down to the inordinate level of success that the coin-op enjoyed compared to other similar projects, and compared to Magnavox's virtually forgotten Odyssey game. Numerous stories report how *Pong* machines would regularly break down due to being overloaded with quarters, and that punters would queue up outside bars just to have a go on it.

As games go then, *Pong* pretty much single-handedly proved that electronic gaming was a credible form of entertainment, and one that could, in fact, generate an enormous profit. Perhaps if it hadn't done so well, fewer companies would have begun creating videogames, and many great titles may never have existed.

Whatever happened to?

The M2 Accelerator



First it was an add-on, then a standalone console and an arcade machine. Then it was cancelled. So what happened to the 64-bit machine that would "change the way people play, learn and interact"?

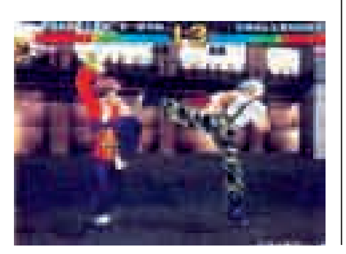
Although the 3DO Interactive Multiplayer failed to become the multimedia family entertainment system that Trip Hawkins hoped, he wasn't going to back down after one failed attempt. In August 1994, less than four months before the Japanese launch of the PSone, 3DO announced that it was in the process of developing a 64-bit add-on for the 3DO console. The M2 Accelerator promised to deliver substantial polygon-pushing power beyond that of the original machine and the new SEGA and Sony consoles. The problem was that while a million polygons per second, high-resolution imagery and filtered textures sounded great, the poor sales of the 3DO meant few third-party developers were interested.

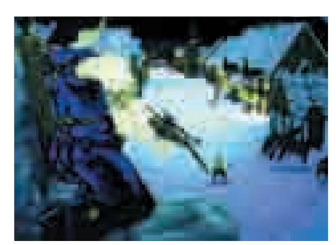
Despite this, 3DO soldiered on with its new technology, though just over a year later Matsushita (aka Panasonic) bought the rights to the M2 project for $100 million (£62 million). By that time a few titles were nearing completion, including Warp's promising survival horror *D2* (see page 148). Sadly, Matsushita felt that the limited amount of software that was ready would be detrimental to the success of the machine and decided to postpone the launch until the following year.

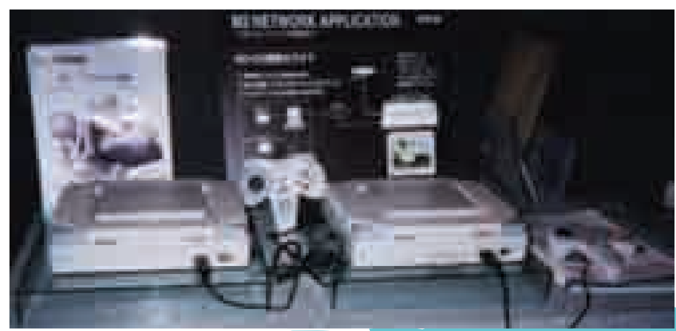
By July of 1996, however, it was clear that an add-on for the 3DO simply wasn't going to sell. But rather than cancelling the project, Matsushita continued preparing the machine for release as a standalone console. Amazingly, even at this late stage, the hardware specifications still weren't complete, purely because the designers were trying to keep the technology as current as possible. This situation continued into 1997, by which time an M2-compatible arcade board had been announced, along with a handful of new games.

It seemed as though things were finally falling into place, but by June rumours that the machine had been cancelled were starting to circulate. In July, Matsushita announced that the M2 technology would never be released as a games console. Even so, work on the chipset continued and talk was widespread that the machine would be used for education, karaoke or even for training purposes in the armed forces.

The last we heard was that M2 technology was being used in kitchen appliances such as microwaves and dishwashers, though quite how a million textured polygons could help to heat a bowl of soup is beyond us.







▲ All this console goodness is now powering the insides of your dishwasher. No, really.

Game for a laugh

Despite the lengthy development period of the M2, hardly any games were ever unveiled, probably because most third-party developers were wary after poor sales of the 3DO. Even so, a few promising titles were revealed, including Warp's *D2* (which looked completely different from the Dreamcast version on page 148), 3DO's own *IMSA Racing*, and the British-developed RPG *Power Crystal*. Sadly, the companies that did support the M2 never saw a return on their time or money.





▲ What were they thinking? Making games for the M2? Ha!



Those Graftgold sorts were dream developers, responsible for a raft of great original titles and some of the finest conversions ever seen

Graftgold Games

If you're not familiar with one of Graftgold's original titles, you'll have almost certainly played one of its conversions. The talented software house created original games such as *Uridium*, *Paradroid* and *Fire And Ice*, as well as superb ports of games such as *Flying Shark* and *Rainbow Islands*.

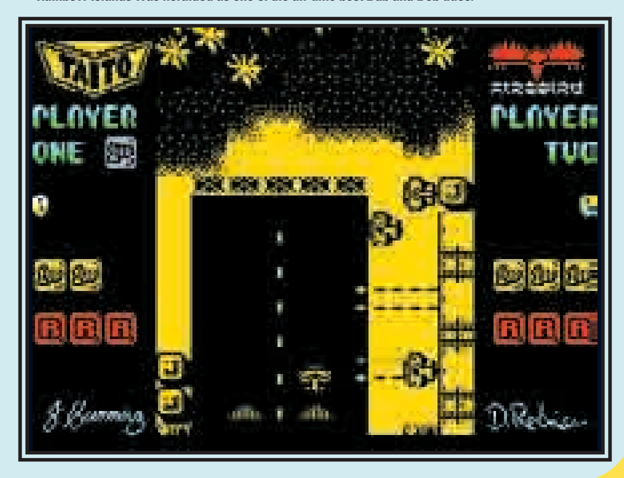
Graftgold started off as ST Software, named after programmer Steve Turner. Turner had struck a deal with Andrew Hewson of Hewson Consultants and began creating games such as *3D Space Wars* and *3D Lunar Attack*. Finding programming lonely work, Turner quickly turned to his friend Andrew Braybrook to help him out.

As royalties began to rise, Graftgold was created and quickly found success with *Paradroid*, *Uridium* and *Avalon*, while still keeping firm ties with Hewson. Eventually, Graftgold teamed up with British Telecomsoft and created a conversion of the excellent *Flying Shark* (a vertical scrolling shoot-'em-up). Unfortunately, legal troubles arose with Hewson over the rights to a couple of games that Graftgold had created, and though Hewson settled out of court it was the first of several run-ins for the firm. Although *Rainbow Islands* had been created when Graftgold was still at British Telecomsoft, disputes with Taito (the original arcade title's creator) meant that the game was released under the Ocean banner.

As conversion work dried up, Graftgold found it harder to stay afloat. Unable to create new products due to the expensive costs of PlayStation development kits, Graftgold closed its doors in 1996, 15 years after Steve Turner started creating games. We caught up with Steve to find out exactly what it was that made Graftgold great…



▲ *Rainbow Islands* was heralded as one of the all-time best Bub and Bob titles.



Paradroid

Paradroid is classic 8-bit release that combines shoot-'em-up and strategy elements to create a wonderfully unique title. Controlling a prototype droid known as the Influence Device, you must clear a set of gradually more taxing decks of their droid hosts before they run amok.

Droids could be destroyed by shooting or ramming them, or via a cerebral sub-game involving circuitry. Your droid also had a limited sense of its surroundings, and was not able to see through walls or around corners. With many of the decks being several screens high this gave a pseudo-3D outlook to a 2D game.

Paradroid received an Amiga update in 1990 (*Paradroid 90*) that had more of the intense gameplay that had served the C64 so well.

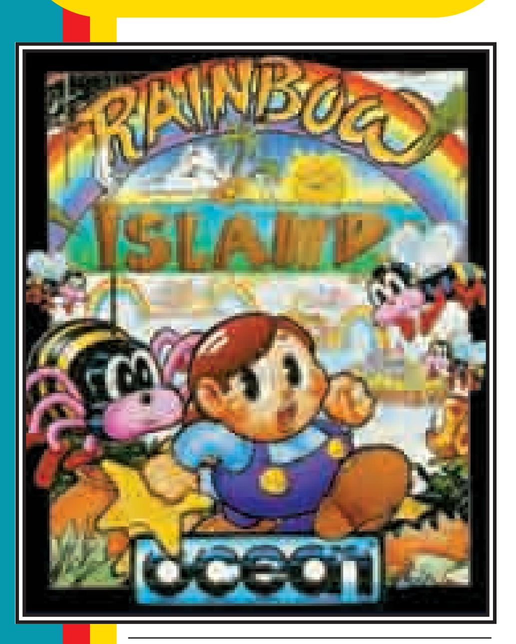
▲ Despite an Amiga update, *Paradroid* never made it to later systems. A shame really, as the mix of shooting and puzzling worked very well.

Rainbow Islands

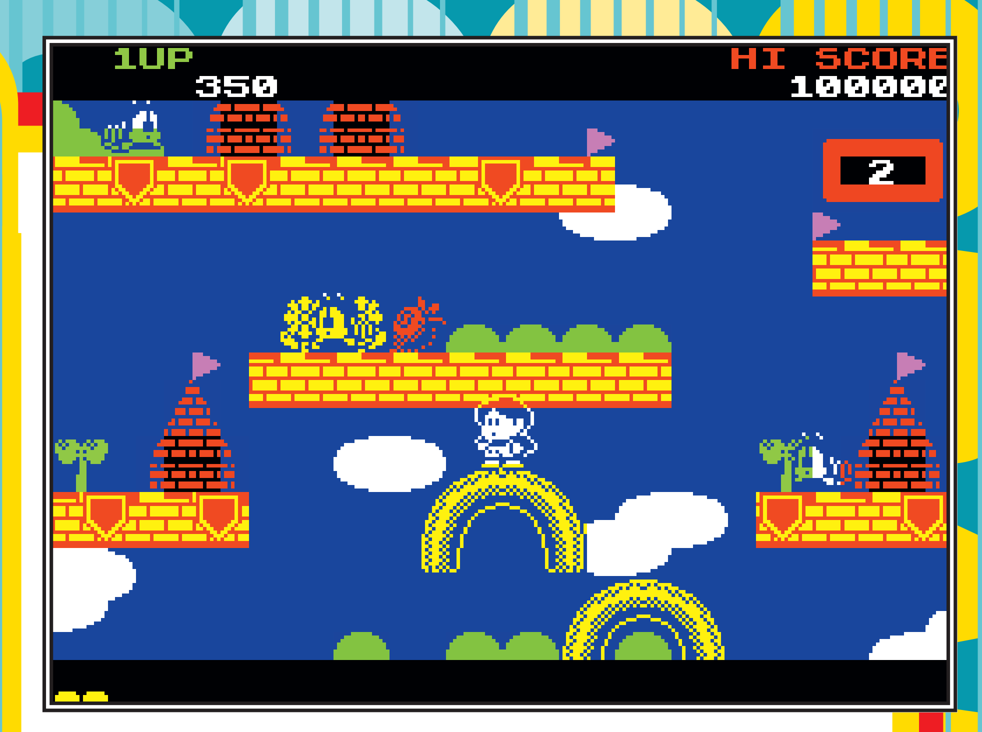
Arguably one of the greatest conversions ever completed (across all formats too, we might add), *Rainbow Islands* was without doubt one of Graftgold's greatest achievements. After successfully being turned back into humans, *Bubble Bobble*'s Bub and Bob found themselves in the titular Rainbow Islands. Being rather unstable, each island was slowly sinking into the rising sea, so you had to use your handy ability of creating rainbows to make your way to the goal at the top of each island, which was several screens tall.

Like its predecessor, *Rainbow Islands* was extremely addictive and had a great theme tune (in this case a jazzed-up version of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*) that perfectly suited the pace of the game. Although players took alternate turns, there were plenty of hidden bonuses (capturing monsters in rainbows and then destroying them would release one of seven rainbow gems) to ensure that there was plenty of pleasure in beating your opponent.

Like *Flying Shark* before it, *Rainbow Islands* was a huge licence that would not normally have been given to a development company of Graftgold's size. The end result, however, was utterly superb and a testament to Braybrook and the rest of the talented team. It's perhaps fitting that the Saturn and PlayStation versions of *Rainbow Islands* were the last conversions Graftgold made before it finally closed its doors.



▲ Bub (or is it Bob?) and Bob (or, er, Bub, obviously) are now known for their *Super Bust-A-Move* titles.



An Interview With…

Graftgold co-founder Steve Turner

Q: How did you start programming?

A: I started out at school. The first computer I programmed was a desk-sized machine with 512 bytes of core memory. Programs were loaded onto paper tape and had to be translated to another tape. Then you had to feed in a whole reel of paper tape to run your 'object' tape. The answer was then typed onto a Teletype machine. The programs did things like work out the first 10 square numbers.

Q: How did your partnership with Andrew Braybrook come about?

A: I met Andrew when a mutual friend heard he had programmed some games that ran on an IBM mainframe. As we had a couple of these at the insurance brokers where we worked, we tried to get a copy of one of the games running. Unfortunately, it came on a box full of punched cards and we didn't get far.

Q: Do you still keep in touch now?

A: Andrew works with me at a firm that programs insurance systems, so it's turned full circle for us, as that's where I also originally came from.

Q: What was your ethos for making games, and who was your inspiration?

A: We made games that we personally wanted to play. We weren't in it for the money – that was a bonus.We hardly had any cheats in our early games; we played them start to finish for real and enjoyed doing it. We play-tested everything ourselves to get the ultimate tuning. Our inspirations were other pioneers who were pushing the edge – people like Jeff Minter, Archer Maclean and the guys at Ultimate.



▲ Steve Turner (right) and Andrew Braybrook are the brains behind *Rainbow Islands*. We're not worthy, and so on.

Q: What was your favourite machine to work on and why?

A: I loved the Spectrum because it was very accessible. There wasn't much hardware to learn and the software techniques were everything. Whoever wrote the best algorithms basically got the best results. Nowadays, you have to rely so much on hardware and other peoples' systems that it's hard to superdrive a machine.

Q: How long would it take you to port a game to various machines?

A: We got very good at porting, especially our own stuff, which was written to be portable – we could do a first draft of our later stuff in two days. However, making it fly on another machine took much longer. To reach commercial quality our fastest ports were



▲ The Mega Drive, perhaps more than any other 16-bit system, was inundated with licensed platformers, so it's perhaps not surprising that *The Ottifants* isn't that fondly remembered today.

about six weeks, with better ones taking considerably longer, perhaps a year.

Q: *Rainbow Islands* was one of the best universal ports ever made. Did you realise it was something special during development?

A: We knew we could do better than most of the ports we had seen. The average quality was poor and being done in a hurry by bedroom programmers. I think we could have made a bigger splash with a game someone had heard of. All the big ports went to conversion developers who churned them out for big fees. I think we showed them how to do it properly.

Q: How much easier was it to work on the 16-bit machines?

A: The main difference was being able to compile and save the game using the actual machine. It's so much easier developing when you can press a button and know you've saved your source to disk, rather than having to wait up to five minutes to tape a copy that might not even load. By the time the 16-bit machines arrived we were compiling on PCs and downloading to the 8-bits. That made programming easy for a while but it didn't last long. With 16-bit, the support software available just got better and better. We gave up writing our own debuggers and loaders so we could spend more time writing the games.

Q: And how did you find the eventual transition to consoles?

A: Consoles were very similar to the 16-bits, especially the Amiga as it had lots of hardware to assist you. The SEGA systems used the same assemblers, and we could use a SEGA version of the same development system. The real difference we found was blowing ROMs rather than having to simply deliver on disks (that was a pain). Dealing with the console licensor as well as the publisher also took more artistic control away from us. They had their own ideas and made sure you adhered to them even if you had more experience in making the correct game decisions.

Q: Your later titles didn't do as well as *Uridium* and *Rainbow Islands*. Do you think the magic got lost?

A: We still had the magic, but things had moved on. What the commercial industry praised were bigger, more expensive products that didn't seem to rate the gameplay. Even with 16-bits the emphasis was on better graphics rather than better gameplay. Movie sequences also stole the limelight. Huge publishers and development teams were in a better position to deliver

The Ottifants

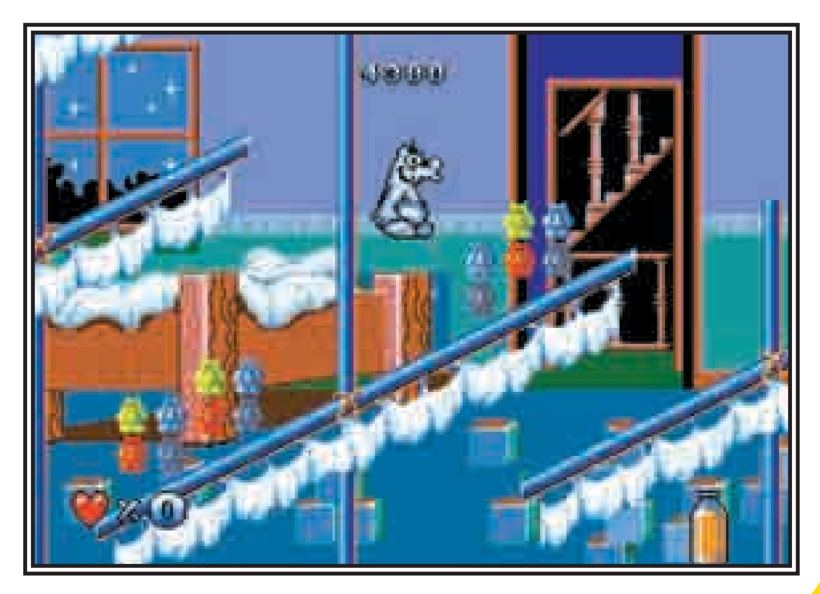
The Ottifants marked a big change in direction for Graftgold. Safely under SEGA's wing, it was asked to create a game based on a new German cartoon.

Although initially assured that *The Ottifants* (a story about a bizarre family of elephant-like creatures) would receive massive exposure and become the next *Simpsons*, the series performed poorly and never reached half the countries it was intended to. As a result, Graftgold was left with a licensed game that lacked the pulling power to sell (it didn't help that *The Ottifants* itself was far from one of Graftgold's best products).

Taking on the role of baby Bruno, you had to negotiate a series of colourful levels and collect what looked like elephant-shaped jelly babies. Gather enough and you could move onto the next level. Despite its impressive cartoon visuals, the game suffered in numerous departments; Bruno was a complete bugger to control and would constantly slide around as if he was on ice, many of the jumps and obstacles were particularly hard to negotiate (leading to numerous frustrating deaths), and Bruno himself was a far from appealing character (although, admittedly, this wasn't Graftgold's fault).

Ultimately, however, it was SEGA's strict schedule that became *The Ottifants*' undoing. Producing a *Sonic* rival in only three months was an impossible task and in the end, the game suffered greatly.

▼ Graftgold were assured *The Ottifants* would be bigger than *The Simpsons*, which was a really cruel trick…

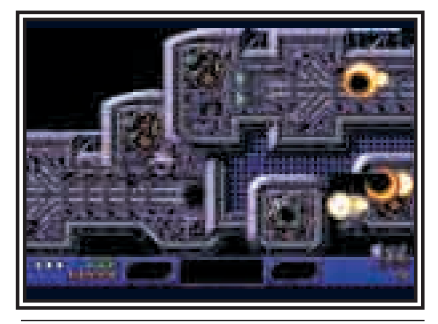


Uridium

There's little doubt that the fast-paced *Uridium* was a game that separated the men from the boys when it first launched on the C64 in 1985. Forget about multiple weapons or sophisticated add-ons; your Manta ship just had a simple set of lasers and a steady hand was needed to keep your prized ship in one piece.

Each level took place above a huge mothership (known as a Dreadnought) and not only did you have to shoot down waves of enemy fighters, you'd have to navigate the heavily armoured Dreadnoughts as well. If all that wasn't enough, you also had to deal with numerous homing mines that would quickly zone in on you at the first opportunity.

Although it was eventually converted to the Amstrad CPC-464 and Spectrum, it was the C64 where *Uridium* really excelled. Smooth scrolling, some lovely chunky visuals and an absolutely rocking soundtrack combined to create an amazing experience that still holds up today.



▲ *Uridium* is one of the shooters we'd love to see updated for today's systems. How about it, Steve?

A frantic two-player option made for some great grudge matches and few could resist the chance to go back and beat that latest high score. *Uridium* received a C64 update in 1986 and a full-blown sequel on the Amiga in 1993. The NES's *The Last Starfighter* was *Uridium* too – just with a film licence and a new main ship.



these, and after spending millions on them would then spend equal amounts on advertising to con the world that's what they should buy. Funny, I don't hear anyone saying: "Do you remember the movie to such and such?". It's like the crowd who cheer the emperor's new clothes.

Q: Were the old days better?

A: The pioneer days of the games industry were very special. You could start out with hardly any outlay, finish a game in six weeks and sell enough to keep you going for a year. It didn't last long before the suits took over, but those early days had a great deal of freedom for a programmer. New game genres were invented all the time and you weren't expected to fit a commercial mould. I think there is room for that pioneering to go on away from all the big triple-A products controlled by the publishing giants. At the moment, there isn't an easy machine for people to experiment on. You need to use operating systems that constantly change rather than take over the machine.

Q: How difficult was it to keep Graftgold going? Is there anything you would have done differently?

A: Everything's easier with hindsight. What I most regretted was not getting into publishing when it was a cottage industry. The small publishers who survived sold out to larger publishers for a fortune. Owning at least a stake in a publisher would have let us keep artistic control. There's nothing worse than to see a good product get spoilt by bad decisions from a publisher.

Q: What was your favourite Graftgold game?

A: *Dragontorc* was my personal favourite. Of Andrew's, I think *Paradroid* is a masterpiece of design.

Q: What games do you wish you had worked on?

A: I am great fan of Sid Meyers and would have loved to have been a part of *Civilization*. My other wish would to be part of the *Doom* team. They were pioneering at a time when most games were following set patterns.

Q: What are you up to these days?

A: I've been at the same firm with Andrew since Graftgold disappeared. After all the turmoil of trying to keep a company going, it was a well-earned rest that paid well. I've now been there five years – I'm in the research and development team.

Q: Would you ever be tempted to come back to the industry?

A: I do consider it now and then but with my kids going through university, my priority is a stable job. The games industry is a stormy sea at the best of times. I am ready to rejoin the industry for the right company – I no longer want to run a company though, just concentrate on creating great games.

Fire And Ice

Cool Coyote may not have been one of the best known game characters of all time, but at least he managed to appear in a decent game before he went to the great retro videogame heaven. Debuting on the Amiga, *Fire And Ice* was an incredibly colourful jaunt that had Cool traversing a range of typical platform locations – colourful forests, deep under the sea and even precarious snow-covered mountain ranges.

Despite not being that memorable, Cool had a rather nifty way of defeating the various enemies that were scattered about the many beautifully drawn levels. The coyote could fire ice pellets at his many opponents, eventually causing them to freeze over. Once this has been achieved, walking into the now frozen form would shatter it. Certain enemies would then drop a frozen fragment of the key that was needed to unlock the next level. Fortunately the missing pieces were always hidden randomly throughout the sprawling levels, meaning that it wasn't just a simple case of memorising each location.

Fire And Ice had plenty of secrets scattered around its many levels and managed to appear on various other systems including the Master System, PC, Game Gear and the ill-fated Amiga CD-32. Graftgold also developed a finished version for the Mega Drive, but disputes between Virgin and Renegade (the game's publishers) meant it was never released



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

D2 FROM WARP

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

Some games are in development for years but never come out. Others, however, do get released but never make it as far as Europe. D2 is one of those games.

Title: **D2**
Developer: **Warp**
Format: **Dreamcast**
Release date: **1999**

When SEGA unveiled the Dreamcast in 1998, one of the most prominent titles on show was *D2* from Warp. Following on from the FMV-based *D* (which had been released on the PSone and Saturn in 1996), this promising-looking title was clearly one of the most complete Dreamcast launch titles, featuring some impressive snowy landscapes. Screenshots also showed the return of Scully-like heroine, Laura Parton.

As time went by, more screenshots were made available, each cementing the fact that *D2* really was going to be something special. Although almost every image looked nigh-on identical to those shown at the unveiling, the ability to cross wide stretches of land on a snow speeder and the option to use a shotgun from a first-person point of view had gamers salivating in anticipation.

However, things took a turn for the worse when the game was shown in playable form. Warp's eccentric CEO, Kenji Eno, not only oversaw complete development of the game, but also composed all the music. At a classy event at which guests were offered Eno-san's home-made curry, the audience was treated to a live performance of *D2*'s music played on violin and piano, before the early Dreamcast console was powered up. With Eno-san at the controls, Laura momentarily hobbled around in the snow looking a little like Cilla Black with a broken ankle, before dropping through the floor and disappearing.



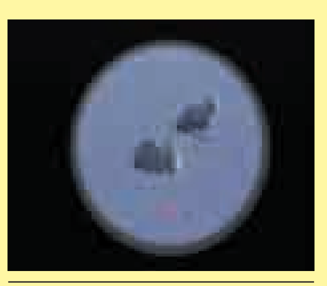
▲ Off she goes, stumbling majestically through the snowy wastes…

Embarrassed by the obviously unfinished state of the code, Eno-san hurried over to console and flicked off the power.

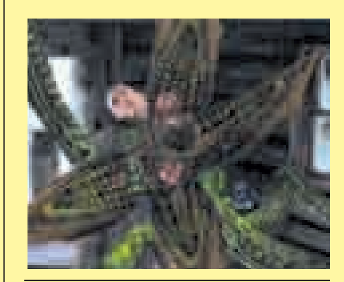
Of course, this was all prior to the release of the Dreamcast hardware, yet despite Warp's best efforts, *D2* was nowhere near ready for the launch – it eventually arrived in Japan on 23 December 1999, over a year after the console came out. The huge amount of game data required four Dreamcast GD-Roms, which was particularly surprising considering that most of the adventure took place in the same snowy landscapes that had been unveiled all those months earlier.

D2 launched in America in 2000, though it wasn't very well-received (funnily enough). The lacklustre launch had little to do with the quality of the game, though – the problem was that *D2* was already looking horribly dated compared to many other Dreamcast games. Capcom's *Resident Evil* was giving survival horror fans everything they needed, while similarly themed titles, such as *The House Of The Dead 2*, were clearly better looking.

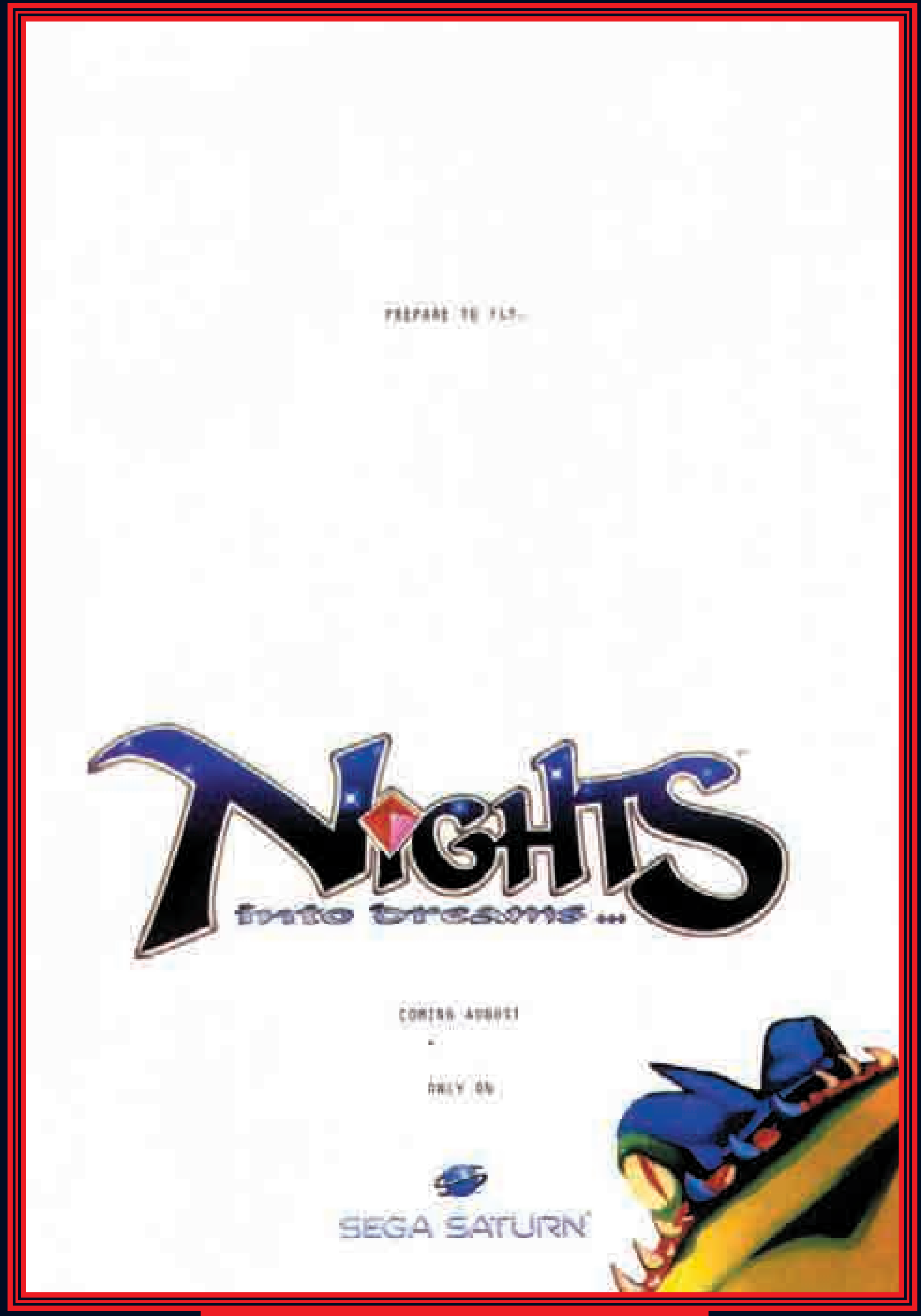
Things were worse still in Europe. The Dreamcast was struggling to stay afloat and, after disappointing sales of *D2* in the States, the game was dropped from European release schedules. Apparently, Warp has since gone into liquidation and Kenji Eno has left the games industry.



▲ Oh, bless, bunnies. But all the rabbits in the world can't make up for a shoddy game.



▲ What a terrifying sight. Just look at those crude graphics and the dated animation…



NiGHTS Into Dreams (Saturn) SEGA, 1996 – American advertisement



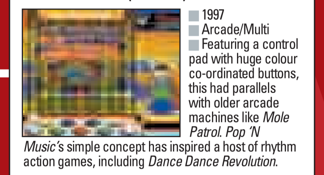
PARAPPA THE RAPPER

■ 1996 ■ PSone
■ With its memorable characters and catchy tunes, this may not have been the first rhythm action game (the mini-games in *Toejam & Earl II* were earlier), but it was the one that sparked interest in the genre. A follow-up came out on PS2 last year, but didn't do too well.

PERIPHERALS

FEET

POP 'N MUSIC (SERIES)



■ 1997
■ Arcade/Multi
■ Featuring a control pad with huge colour co-ordinated buttons, this had parallels with older arcade machines like *Mole Patrol*. *Pop 'N Music's* simple concept has inspired a host of rhythm action games, including *Dance Dance Revolution*.

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION (SERIES)

■ 1998
■ Arcade/Multi
■ *DDR* (aka *Dancing Stage*) has been a runaway success all around the world. Played by pressing floor buttons with your feet, Konami's popular series has influenced the development of other similar titles, such as *Jungle Book Groove Party*.

BEATMANIA (SERIES)



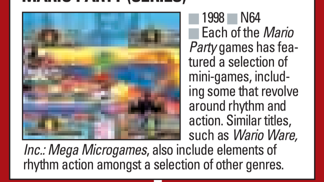
■ 1998
■ Arcade/Multi
■ Popular with DJ wannabes, *Beatmania* is played using a small keyboard and a plastic turntable. Like many other rhythm action games, the series features licensed music tracks, as well as some of Konami's own wonderful compositions.

BUST-A-GROOVE

■ 1998
■ Arcade/PSone
■ Development of *Bust-A-Groove* was almost certainly due to the success of *Parappa The Rapper* in 1996. With a more funky edge, the game features plenty of flares and afros, though its popularity has now been eclipsed by the likes of *DDR*.

OTHER GAMES

MARIO PARTY (SERIES)



■ 1998 ■ N64
■ Each of the *Mario Party* games has featured a selection of mini-games, including some that revolve around rhythm and action. Similar titles, such as *Wario Ware, Inc.: Mega Microgames*, also include elements of rhythm action amongst a selection of other genres.

GUITAR FREAKS (SERIES)

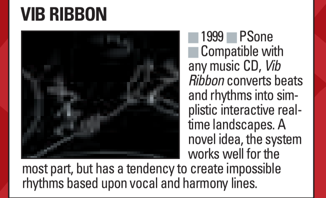
■ 1999
■ Arcade/Multi
■ Continuing Konami's trend for including mammoth peripherals with its arcade rhythm action games, *Guitar Freaks* offers would-be rockers the chance to thrash some metal, even if they have no musical ability at all. This game is extremely popular in Japan.

SHENMUE

■ 1999 ■ DC/Xbox
■ Like *Mario Party*, the *Shenmue* games incorporate rhythm action elements (among many others). Entitled QTEs (Quick Time Events) a percentage of the fights and interactive cut-scenes require timed button presses as indicated by on-screen pointers.

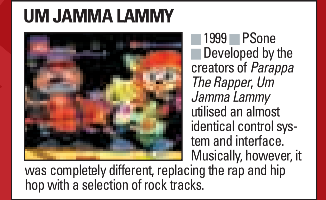
CREATE YOUR OWN

VIB RIBBON



■ 1999 ■ PSone
■ Compatible with any music CD, *Vib Ribbon* converts beats and rhythms into simplistic interactive real-time landscapes. A novel idea, the system works well for the most part, but has a tendency to create impossible rhythms based upon vocal and harmony lines.

UM JAMMA LAMMY



■ 1999 ■ PSone
■ Developed by the creators of *Parappa The Rapper*, *Um Jamma Lammy* utilised an almost identical control system and interface. Musically, however, it was completely different, replacing the rap and hip hop with a selection of rock tracks.

SPACE CHANNEL 5





■ 1999 ■ Dreamcast
■ Following on from where *Bust-A-Groove* left off, SEGA's *Space Channel 5* takes the player on a magical adventure around the galaxy. Styled with a wonderfully garish Seventies colour palette, the game stars a sassy central character, aptly named Ulala.

RHYTHM ACTION FAMILY TREE

Over the past six years, the rhythm action genre has become increasingly popular, with titles like *Dance Dance Revolution* (aka *Dancing Stage*) topping charts around the world. Of course, all videogames have always required a certain amount of rhythm and action from the player, and there were arcade machines such as *Mole Patrol* that asked you to do something a little more strenuous than just press buttons. Now, of course, high-quality music tracks can be combined with the action, and many games feature licensed tracks by well-known performers, adding to the genre's popularity.

PARA PARA PARADISE (SERIES)



2000 ■ Arcade/PS2 ■ Similar to *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Para Para Paradise* requires the player to use more than just their feet. Based on popular Japanese dance routines, the game features moves for upper body and probably influenced the development of Sony's Eye Toy.

DRUMMANIA (SERIES)

2000 ■ Arcade/PS2 ■ Seeing as it's the most primitive form of music, it's surprising that it took four years of rhythm action games before Konami released one featuring drums. Not the most innovative game in the family tree, *Drummania* revolves around hitting drum pads in time with music.

KEYBOARDMANIA (SERIES)



2000 ■ Arcade/PS2 ■ Like Drummania, *Keyboardmania* is merely another play on the *Beatmania* (or Bemani) theme. Popular in Japanese arcades, neither this nor *Drummania* has been as successful in the home due to the amount of space taken up by the huge peripherals.

SAMBA DE AMIGO



2000 ■ Arcade/DC ■ The release of this novel rhythm action game saw maracas being used in homes and arcades for the first time (for most gamers, anyway). Featuring upbeat Latin American music tracks and a frenzied monkey, the game is still popular, despite costing a fortune.

DOG OF BAY



2000 ■ PS2 ■ Not many gamers ever got to sample this strange little game, as it has never been released outside Japan. Featuring a gang of humanoid dogs, the game is heavily stylised and is also one of the first next-generation titles to use cel-shading on its characters.

LICENCES

FREQUENCY

2001 ■ PS2 ■ Although, at first, *FreQuency* doesn't look like anything new, it doesn't take long to discover that it offers hard-core rhythm action fans something decent to get their teeth into. Breaking down licensed tracks, the player actually has to control all the instruments.

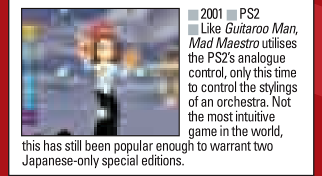
REZ

2001 ■ DC/PS2 ■ An unusual name for an unusual game, *Rez* takes the themes of life and evolution and works them into a bizarre cyber world where rhythm and timing is of the essence. Played in a similar way to *Panzer Dragoon*, firing weapons in time with the beat scores points.

GUITAROO MAN

2001 ■ PS2 ■ Taking things back to the simplicity of *Parappa The Rapper*, *Guitaroo Man* features a bunch of Japanese characters and a simplistic story. Using just about every button on the PS2 control pad, this mimics guitar effects by cleverly using analogue control.

MAD MAESTRO



2001 ■ PS2 ■ Like *Guitaroo Man*, *Mad Maestro* utilises the PS2's analogue control, only this time to control the stylings of an orchestra. Not the most intuitive game in the world, this has still been popular enough to warrant two Japanese-only special editions.

*NSYNC GET TO THE SHOW

2001 ■ Game Boy Color ■ Featuring a huge selection of, er, four mini-games, **Nsync Get To The Show* has very little to do with the actual group, other than the picture on the box. Though this is hardly the best use of a licence, the final mission does feature *Nsync songs.

VOICE

ONLINE

DRUM MASTER

2002 ■ Arcade/PS2 ■ Not content to let Konami have all the fun, Namco's *Drum Master* (or *Taiko no Tatsujin* as it's called in Japan) has been growing in popularity recently. Not dissimilar to *Drummania*, it will be interesting to see if the game ever gets released in the West.

SHAKKA TO TAMBOURINE

2002 ■ Arcade/PSone ■ As the follow-up to *Samba De Amigo*, SEGA's *Shakka To Tambourine* used an almost identical control mechanism but replaced the maracas with a tambourine. Released on PSone in 2002, the game has never been released outside Japan.

BRITNEY'S DANCE BEAT



2002 ■ PS2/GBA ■ What with Justin Timberlake starring in **Nsync Get To The Show*, it wasn't really surprising when a game starring Britney Spears was released in 2002. Although decent enough, this didn't really offer anything particularly new or innovative.

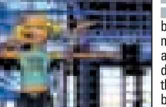
KARAOKE REVOLUTION

2003 ■ PS2 ■ It was inevitable that someone would make a karaoke game at some point, so it was no great shock when Konami and Harmonix revealed *Karaoke Revolution*. Using the PS2 USB headset, the game tracks vocal patterns and grades the player accordingly.

AMPLITUDE

2003 ■ PS2 ■ Although this doesn't look hugely different from *FreQuency*, released in 2001, Harmonix's second attempt at the rhythm action game improves on the original in a number of ways, the most obvious being the inclusion of a four-player online network mode.

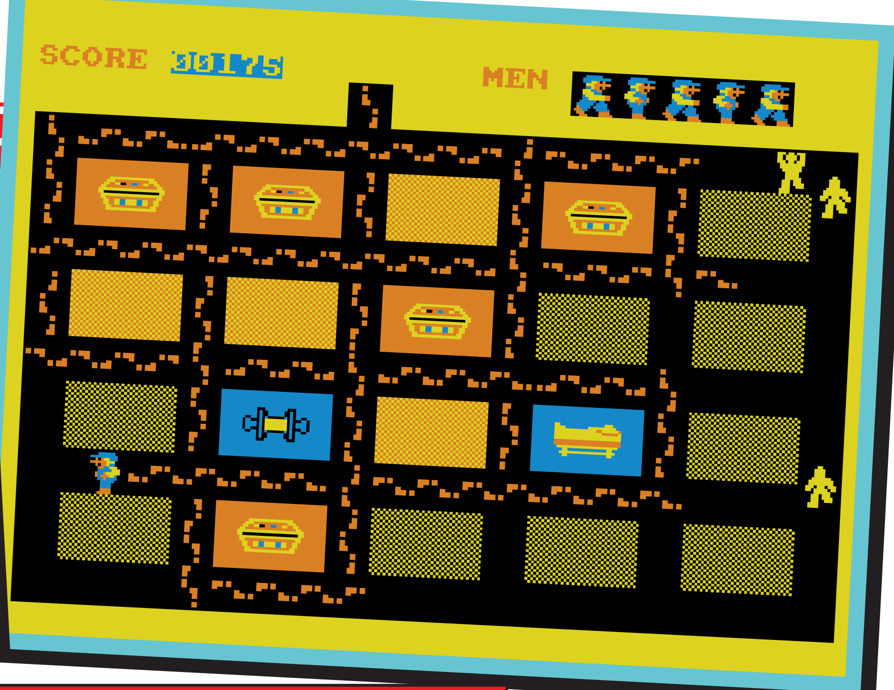
POP IDOL



2003 ■ PC/PS2 ■ Featuring a number of music-based mini-games, *Pop Idol* allows players to decide on the look of their character before going up in front of the judges. By plugging in a dance mat, players are able to dance their way to the top (or not, as the case may be).







▲ It may not look like much, but this was compelling gameplay at its finest.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...

OH MUMMY

Had you been lucky enough to own an Amstrad CPC 464, you'd have received a number of free games with which to start your collection. Hidden amongst the cheap and nasty rubbish that consisted of *Roland On The Ropes*, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* and *Roland In The Caves* was Gem Software's superb *Oh Mummy*, a fantastic (though extremely derivative) *Amidar* clone.

As with many 8-bit games, *Oh Mummy*'s gameplay was extremely simple in concept but incredibly addictive to play. Taking on the role of an archaeologist, you had to make your way into old tombs and empty them of treasure. This would be a simple task if it weren't for the numerous mummies that would insist on chasing you around the various passageways.

Each tomb consisted of a screen containing 20 blocks; running around the blocks would highlight them and release any Egyptian treasure that was hidden away inside. Once all the treasure had been successfully collected, you could progress onto the next level. While slow and simple to begin with, each tomb would get progressively tougher and faster (as well as containing even more mummies) as time went on.

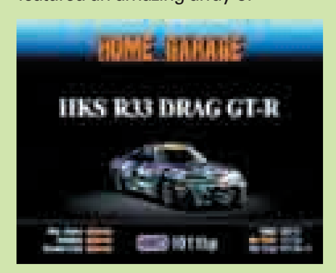
It may have been an incredibly easy game to play, but therein lay *Oh Mummy*'s appeal; here was a game that could even persuade mums and dads to put aside whatever they were doing and try to beat that elusive high score. The fact that this classic was actually given away for free with the machine was also an added bonus. Forget Lara Croft, this was the original Tomb Raider.

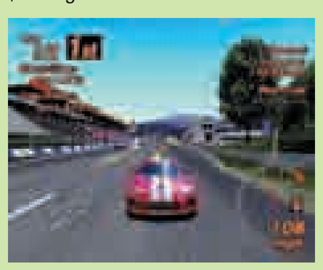
Presentation	80%
Graphics	85%
Playability	95%
Longevity	90%
OVERALL	90%

YOU'RE BUGGING ME

There's nothing more satisfying than finally completing a title and getting that magical one hundred per cent completion screen. Unfortunately, no matter how good a game may be, there's always the odd little glitch that can spoil it

Take *Gran Turismo 2*, for example – here was a racing game that featured an amazing array of features, added rally driving to the mix and made Polyphony Digital the racing sim kings. Despite these extra bells and whistles, *Gran Turismo 2* had one glaring problem – it was impossible to get a full hundred per cent finishing score. The reason for this oversight was because the highly anticipated drag racing tracks had been taken out at the eleventh hour (although a selection of cars still made the cut), meaning that the game could never be completed.





▲ *Gran Turismo 2* was a fantastic game but, try as you might, you just couldn't finish the damn thing.

DMA's *Space Station Silicon Valley* was another game that suffered from not being able to achieve that coveted complete score. Each level had a gold statue that needed to be collected in order to achieve your hundred per cent goal. Fat Bear Mountain, however, contained a bug that caused your character to glitch through the statue instead of collecting it. When questioned about this bizarre occurrence, DMA typically laughed it off and stated that it had been included as a joke (though no-one else saw the funny side). Both of these pale in comparison to the blunder that was Elite's *Airwolf* – the penultimate level contained a series of rocks that needed to be safely negotiated to achieve completion. Unfortunately, they were practically impossible to clear and the few times anyone did manage it, the game immediately crashed. The rumour behind this fiasco was that the development team were so pushed for time that they never actually completed the game and as a result the rock level was made impossible to bypass. Whether this is true or not is hard to say, but we've still never managed to complete the bloody thing.



▲ Did you finish this? No, we still can't either.



A Great RETRO Gaming Moment

R•O•L•L•I•N•G T•H•U•N•D•E•R

Format(s): **Arcade (first), Commodore 64, Mega Drive, Lynx, NES**
Publisher: **Atari (arcade), US Gold (home systems)**
Developer: **Namco**
Release date: **1986 (Arcade)**

Well, there's a surprise – Leila has been kidnapped by crime organisation Geldra, so it's up to the tragically named Albatross of the Rolling Thunder secret agency to rescue his fellow agent. A tired plot maybe, but it was the premise behind a Namco shooter that first appeared in arcades in 1986. That shooter was *Rolling Thunder*, and although its two sequels improved the gameplay, they never reached the level of infamy that the original title did, thanks to its harsh difficulty level.

The game followed Albatross as he took on Geldra's henchmen in narrow levels that ranged from warehouses to the great outdoors and allowed little room for error. The restricted bullet supply and Albatross' ability to leap up onto balconies lent the game a tactical nuance that similar shooters such as *Contra* lacked. The garishly dressed secret agent would have to use his surroundings in order to survive, ducking behind crates to dodge bullets or moving up or down levels when the action got too intense.

It's fortunate that Albatross had these abilities though, as it took much more than quick reactions and a bucketful of change to complete this side-scrolling shooter. Each level stacked the odds against you thanks to guards (known as Maskers) that would relentlessly charge from all directions. Some would burst out of the doors littered throughout the levels and attack with guns and grenades, while others leapt off balconies and tried to fight close-up. Albatross wasn't the strongest of heroes either and would keel over after taking just one shot. Throw in a time limit and some clunky jumping and it's easy to see why gamers in arcades were turning the air blue.

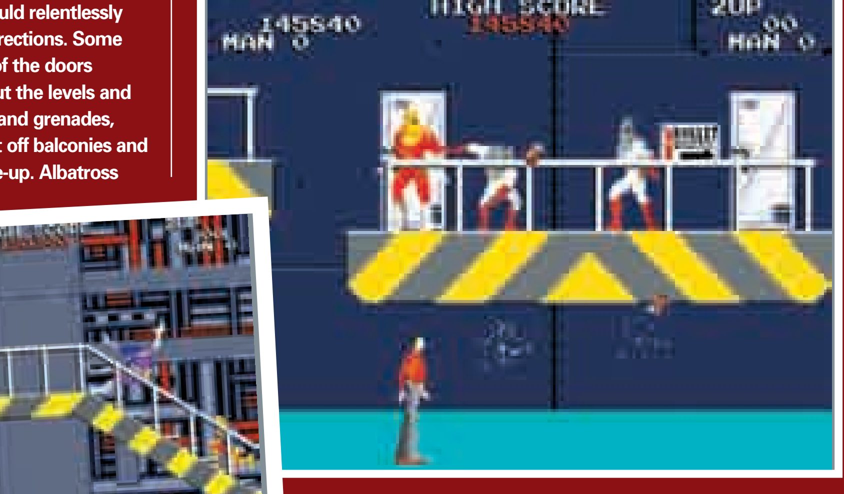
Yet just as it seemed the difficulty curve was insurmountable, you'd discover the doors. Entering a door would reward you with more time or a respite from the frantic gunplay, while doors marked 'BULLETS' would top up the ammo for your pistol. Best of all were the doors marked 'ARMS' that would reward you with a machine gun – the perfect way to even up the odds. Mowing down swathes of guards was extremely satisfying and, while the game remained rock hard, for a brief moment the machine gun made you believe that you could complete the game. Sadly, it would soon run out of bullets, leaving you back with the default pistol and cowering behind crates once more.

It's this brief moment of elation and invulnerability that the machine gun offered that will remain the stand-out moment from Namco's classic shooter. Any gaming moment that makes you feel like you genuinely can take on the world is worthy of note and, in that respect, *Rolling Thunder* made you feel like a true hero.

▲ Pick up that machine gun and suddenly you were king of the world. Although your outfit was still crap.



▲ The Maskers had caught Leila, so it was up to you and your little red shoes to get her back.



TREASURE HUNTER

FANCY YOURSELF AS A BIT OF A COLLECTOR, EH? WELL THEN YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT



For a hard-core gamer who's spent years building up their videogame collection, it can be fairly easy to predict which titles will be worth big bucks in the future. Any half-decent games that get released in limited quantities will usually be worth something at some point, though buying and selling at the right time is often they key to making a decent profit.

Just look at *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, for example. There was a time when it could be picked up for under 20 quid, though you'd be hard-pushed to find it for less than £60 these days. Of course, knowing that Konami's PSone classic is worth so much isn't really of any benefit to collectors who are looking to buy right now. It's the titles that are currently inexpensive but which have the potential to go up in value that budding treasure hunters need to know about.

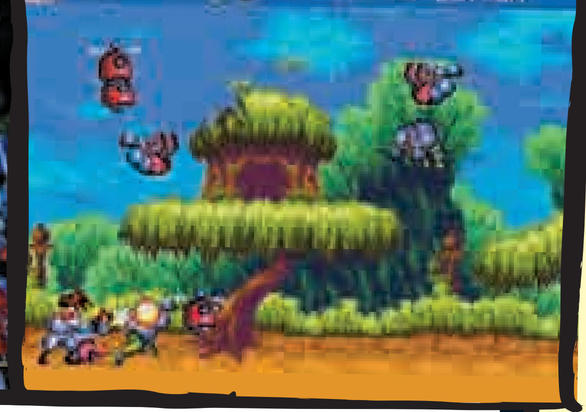
Collectable videogames have a tendency to fluctuate in value, in much the same way that antiques do – the difference is that there are a greater number of variables that affect the price of games, including follow-up titles and enhanced re-releases. There are also a number of other issues that need to be taken into account, such as fashion and origin – two seemingly identical items can vary hugely in price depending on which region of the world they were created for. A UK copy of Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes* may still be worth £10 or so, but the Japanese version is currently worth up to eight times that much.

In this month's Treasure Hunter we'll not only be looking at rare Japanese titles, but also at some UK releases that look set to become collectors' items in the future.

TITLE: Garou: Mark Of The Wolves
FORMAT: Neo-Geo
DEVELOPER: SNK
RELEASED: 2000
VERSION: Any
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £300

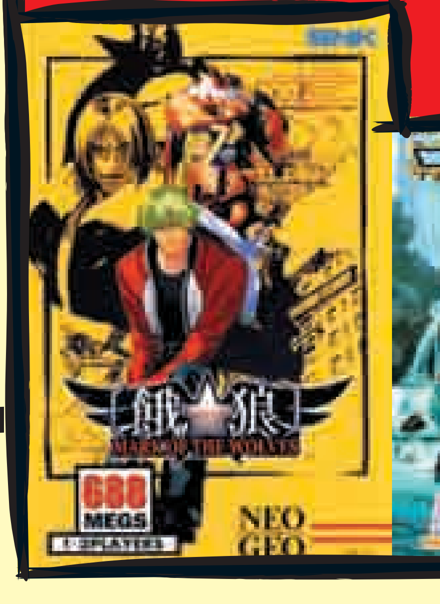
Based on the *Fatal Fury* series, *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* features some of the slickest animation ever seen in a 2D beat-'em-up, which has helped it to remain a firm favourite with SNK fans. Due to the lateness of its release only a limited number of Neo-Geo home cartridges were ever produced, which has resulted in the game retaining a high price. Until recently, it was difficult to find a copy of *Mark Of The Wolves* for under £400, though the value has declined slightly since the 2002 budget re-release of the Dreamcast version in Japan. Interestingly, the Dreamcast game is currently selling for as little as £25, but will almost certainly be worth more in the future. So perhaps snap up one of those instead…





TITLE: Gunstar Heroes
FORMAT: Mega Drive
DEVELOPER: Treasure
RELEASED: 1993
VERSION: Japan
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £80

Gunstar Heroes was the first title to be created by small Japanese developer Treasure back in 1993, and was immediately popular with gamers thanks to its innovative graphical effects and hugely enjoyable two-player mode. As with so many of the company's games, this technically accomplished Mega Drive game was only ever released in limited quantities around the world, though its niche appeal in the West has meant that second-hand copies are still relatively easy to get hold of. Until recently in Japan, however, selling used games was actually an offence, meaning that many older titles have become increasingly rare.

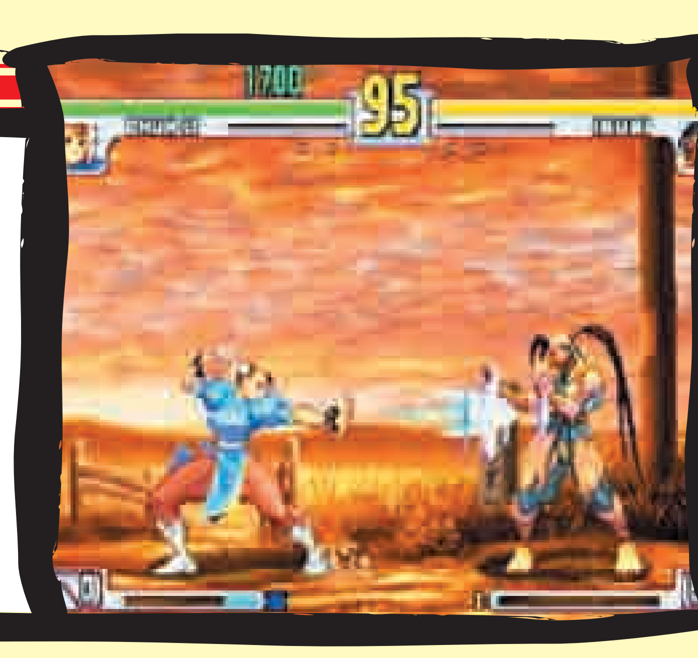


TITLE: Rez
FORMAT: Dreamcast
DEVELOPER: SEGA UGA
RELEASED: 2002
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £45

R*ez* was one of the last Dreamcast games to be released in the UK and, as such, was almost impossible to get hold of, even at the time of its launch. The few copies that were around, however, were selling at inflated prices from day one, though it's since become possible to find used copies in second-hand shops for as little as £20. This superb little game is ideal for anyone wishing to start collecting, as recent copies listed on eBay have gone for as much as £70, and it seems unlikely that the situation will change. The PS2 version, on the other hand, isn't nearly as collectable and can currently be found for just £10.

TITLE: Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike
FORMAT: Dreamcast
DEVELOPER: Capcom
RELEASED:2000
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE:£30

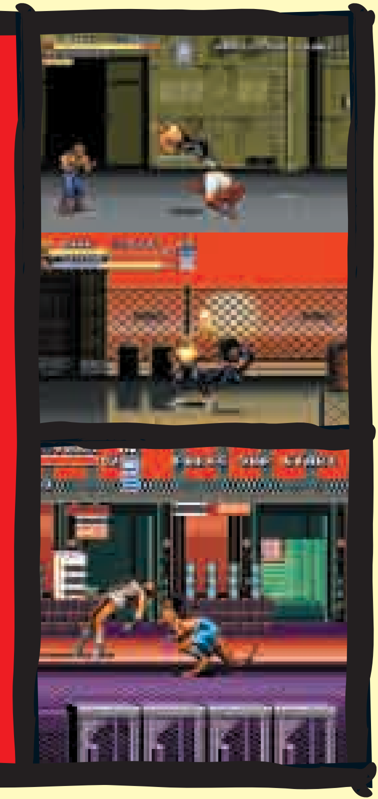
With so many *Street Fighter* games released across so many formats it seems unlikely that any could become particularly collectable, and for the time being that certainly seems to be the case. Even so, the Dreamcast was the only console to ever receive a translation of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, and, somewhat amazingly, it was actually released in the UK. It's certainly not the most common of Dreamcast games, but it's not all that hard to find used copies for under £30 either. Right now, it probably isn't worth a lot more than that, but there's a good chance its value will at least double over the next few years.

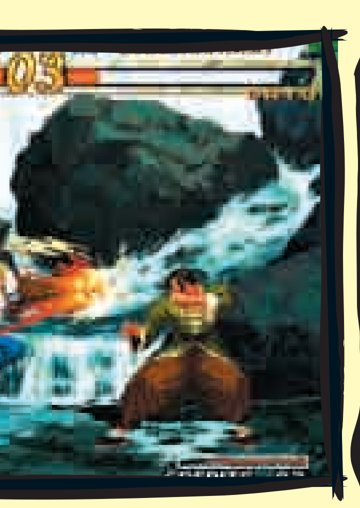




TITLE: Streets Of Rage 3
FORMAT: Mega Drive
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1994
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £45

SEGA's *Streets Of Rage* series has attracted its fair share of fans over the years, and it's not hard to see why. The first game wasn't too shabby-looking and Yuzo Koshiro's sublime musical compositions certainly helped to create a gritty atmosphere that far surpassed that of its nearest competitors. Nevertheless, as the series developed, each game seemed to lose a little of the magic, and by the time the third instalment was released in 1994 it was all starting to feel a little tired. This was a difficult time, what with 2D games rapidly becoming extinct and developers struggling to come to terms with polygons, and just a handful of PAL copies were released, so best see if you can track one down now…





TITLE: Waku Waku 7
FORMAT: Neo-Geo
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft
RELEASED: 1996
VERSION: Japan
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £350

Sunsoft isn't particularly well known for creating arcade beat-'em-ups, but it certainly did a good job with *Waku Waku 7*. Only ever released in Japan, the game captured the spirit of an anime cartoon while approaching the sort of quality gameplay you'd expect from Capcom or SNK. Unsurprisingly, few gamers have ever heard of it on these shores, and seeing as so few copies were ever imported, it remains highly priced. The game was also released on the SEGA Saturn and currently sells for around £45. While it's unlikely that the Neo-Geo version will rise in value a great deal, it's highly possible that the Saturn translation will increase slightly in the coming years.





CLASSIC CONSOLE

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: 3DO Interactive Multiplayer
- PRICE: £60
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  Super Street Fighter II: Turbo (est. price £10)
  Samurai Shodown (est. price £10)
  Crash And Burn (est. price £8)
- Despite being a fairly pricey £60, the 3DO is a worthy console with one or two classic games available.

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To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
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- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

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This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Paragon Publishing Ltd cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

G.T.M.

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world!





LOT 24 – Atari 2600 (wood effect) plus two paddles in carry case. Includes 39 games in plastic bookcases, Trackball, two additional paddles, Quickshot joystick, two classic joysticks, video touch pad and two keyboard controllers plus game manuals. Console needs attention. £80. Birmingham

LOT 25 – **Neo-Geo Pocket Color** and six games including *Neo Turfmasters*, *Neo World Cup* and *Fatal Fury*. All boxed as new. £80 including p+p. Merseyside

LOT 26 – *Doom* for PSone. Boxed but no instructions, good condition. £2.50 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 27 – *Hardcore 4X4* for PSone. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £2.50 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 28 – *Jungle Strike* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 29 – *Moonwalker* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 30 – *Rock 'N Roll Racing* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 31 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color and six games including *Metal Slug* and *Sonic*. Boxed as new. £80. Warwickshire



Lot 32 – *Arcade* multiformat games mag. All 12 issues. £20. Warwickshire

Lot 33 – *Get Bass* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with fishing rod in mint condition. £40

Lot 34 – *House Of The Dead 2* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with gun in mint condition. £35

Lot 35 – *Seaman* for SEGA Dreamcast, USA version. Boxed with microphone in mint condition. £30

Lot 36 – *The King Of Fighters '99 Dream Match*, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 37 – *Capcom Vs. SNK* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 38 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* for Neo-Geo AES, Japanese version. Boxed in very good condition. £260. Sussex

Lot 39 – *Terranigma* for SNES, PAL version. Boxed in very good condition. £80. Sussex

WANTED

WANTED 07 – ***King Of Fighters '98*** (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 08 – *King Of Fighters 2000* (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and complete with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 09 – *Last Resort* for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 10 – *Miracle Piano* teaching cartridge for NES (UK version). Must be in good working order. Suffolk

WANTED 11 – *Dragon(s) Crystal* for SEGA Game Gear. Preferably with box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 12 – *Azure Dreams* for Sony PSone. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 13 – *Vandal Hearts* for Sony Playstation. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 14 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for SEGA Saturn. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 15 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini* for SEGA Game Gear. Preferably with box and instructions. Poole

WANTED 16 – *Bomberman* compatible Multi-tap for Mega Drive. Bournemouth

WANTED 17 – C64 games. Anything considered. Liverpool

WANTED 18 – *Chrono Trigger* for Super Nintendo. Preferably with box and instructions. Will pay up to £70. Londonderry, NI

WANTED 19 – WonderSwan dating games. Must be in good condition with boxes and instructions. Surrey

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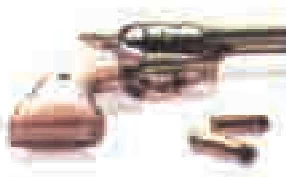
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GUN.SMOKE (NES) Capcom, 1988 – American advertisement


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PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

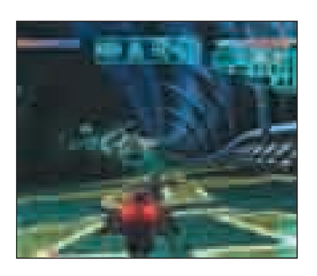
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.



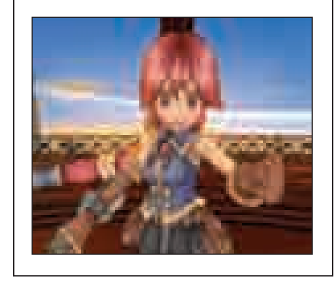
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Chronicle IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Amplitude IMPORT	Sony	Harmonix
10	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House
13	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
14	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
15	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
16	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
17	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
18	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
19	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2
20	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games

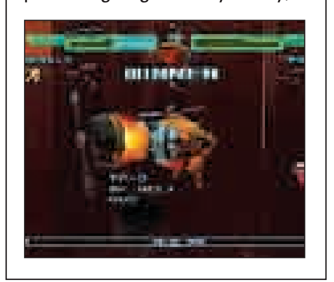
VIEWPOINT
XGRA
Faster than a speeding bullet, Acclaim's latest effort is also one its better titles to date – oh, how surprised we were. Many may argue that *Wipeout* still holds the crown but with no new game in sight, we reckon *XGRA* is only a fraction of a second behind.



VIEWPOINT
DARK CHRONICLE
Okay, Sony – what's going on here? There we were, all ready to enjoy the loveliness of *Dark Cloud 2* (as it'll be known over here) in June and then… nothing. With no UK release date in sight, it's a shame you're all missing out on what is a truly epic RPG.



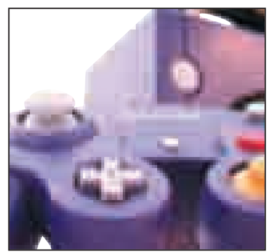
VIEWPOINT
R-TYPE FINAL
Yes, it's the end of an era – although the more hard-core shoot-'em-up fans won't think that Irem's swan song has done the series justice. Plus those with any sense already have the original on emulator (not that we're promoting illegal activity. Really).



VIEWPOINT
ICO
Quite frankly, we're both shocked and appalled – during the course of the evening at the **games™** Awards party we discovered at least two individuals who hadn't even heard of *Ico*. Disgraceful. Still, we're sure you're not like these ill-informed fools… are you?













GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. Admittedly, third-party support is rapidly dwindling, but you only have to look at the first-party releases to appreciate the quality gaming on offer – Nintendo still makes some of the finest games you'll ever play and missing out on them isn't an option.

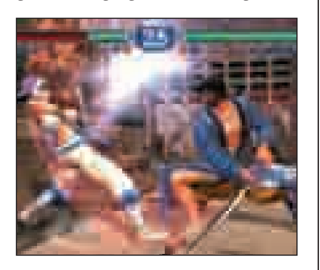


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime		Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker		Nintendo	In-House
3	F-Zero GX	IMPORT	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
4	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	IMPORT	Konami	In-House
5	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
6	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
7	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact		Acclaim	In-House
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
9	Ikaruga		Treasure	In-House
10	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
11	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
12	Soul Calibur II		Namco	In-House
13	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
14	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
15	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
16	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
17	Viewtiful Joe	IMPORT	Capcom	In-House
18	Skies Of Arcadia Legends		SEGA	Overworks
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
20	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House

VIEWPOINT
SOUL CALIBUR II

Oh, you lucky, lucky people you. Waiting might be painful, but at least the (eventual) arrival of a spendid game such as *Soul Calibur II* is worth the anguish. Of course, we've been practising for much longer than you – so don't go challenging us at it, all right?



VIEWPOINT
ULTIMATE MUSCLE

Okay, so we'll admit it – this is a wrestling game. But wait – before you run screaming for the hills, you should know that it looks great (cel-shading – is there nothing it can't do?) and is damn good fun to play. What more could you ask for in a game, eh?



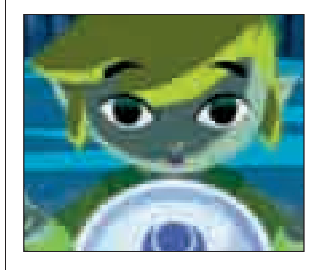
VIEWPOINT
VIEWTIFUL JOE

Having seen a number of Capcom's titles come a cropper in terms of capturing our imaginations (specifically on PS2), we're pleased to see at least one of its 'big' titles make us smile. That said, we're still having trouble with that bloody shark monster…



VIEWPOINT
LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Well, there's a surprise – although there was a bit of a battle for the second and third spot, this year's **games™** Game Of The Year won by a clear margin. The readers have spoken, so take note: you really do need this game.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.





TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Knights Of The Old Republic IMPORT	Activision	BioWare
7	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
11	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
13	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive
18	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House

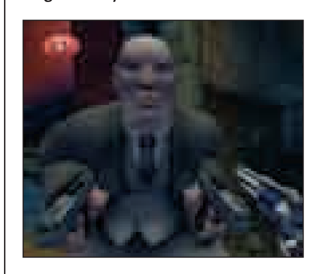
VIEWPOINT
MIDTOWN MADNESS 3

With both *Burnout 2* and *Midnight Club II* taking up a lot of our racing time, we overlooked the single-player game in *Midtown Madness 3*. However, with the online mode proving popular on Xbox Live, it's worth a mention just the same. But only just.



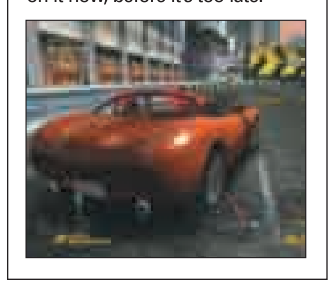
VIEWPOINT
TIMESPLITTERS 2

The game's practically identical on all three formats, but this year's Best Multiplayer game at the **games™** Awards stands out most on the Xbox thanks to the hard drive storage – our collection of multiplayer maps is growing larger every month…



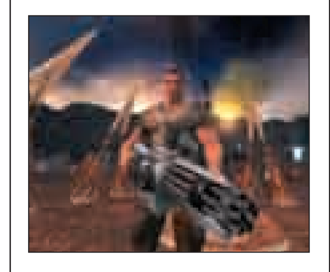
VIEWPOINT
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING

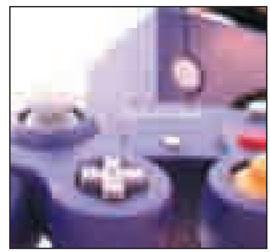
We loved *Project Gotham Racing* but we're blown away by the upcoming sequel – it's hard to go back to the original without wincing. That's why we suggest getting all your playing time in on it now, before it's too late.



VIEWPOINT
BRUTE FORCE

It shot straight to the top of the chart in the US and had a massive advertising campaign over here – but why? We have to admit, *Brute Force*'s success has us well and truly stumped, if only because we thought it was a completely uneventful piece of software.






GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely new SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars 2 IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
2	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
4	Golden Sun: The Lost Age IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
5	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
6	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
9	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

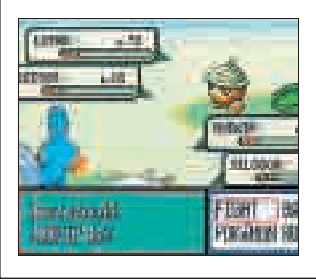
VIEWPOINT
SONIC PINBALL PARTY

Lots of *Sonic* fun, but not enough tables – though we liked it just the same. If only it was as good as Ubi Soft's classic *Pinball Challenge Deluxe* though…



VIEWPOINT
POKÉMON RUBY AND SAPPHIRE

Out now and already covering the land in an almost plague-like wash of blue and red – that's the power of the Pokémon for you.



PC

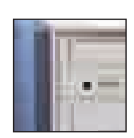
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
3	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
4	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
9	Day Of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
10	Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts

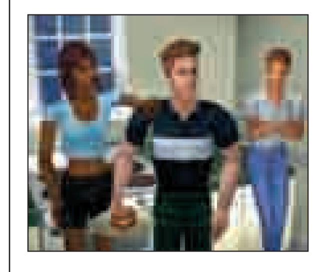
VIEWPOINT
REPUBLIC

It might not have been the killer PC title that Eidos was claiming, but there's no denying that Elixir Studios has come up with something special here.



VIEWPOINT
THE SIMS

Millions of PC owners can't be wrong – even if EA has milked the series dry. With the sequel imminent, though, this is your last chance to enjoy the original.



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

games™ puts the pedal to the metal and heads for sunny Liverpool – home of Bizarre Creations – to go behind the scenes of one of the finest racing games known to man…

NEXT MONTH IN games™

And there we were, thinking that having to fill 180 pages every issue was going to get harder. Instead, it's looking more like we'll need all the space we can get in the next few months…

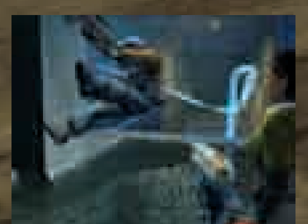
MORE… PREVIEWS

Along with all the hottest gossip from the European Computer Trade Show, we'll be showing you more of the games you want to see – including some surprises that you might not have even known existed.



MORE… REVIEWS

Promises, promises – if the magic release schedule is right, we'll have reviews of *Half-Life 2, XIII, Jak II, Billy Hatcher, Boktai* and plenty of other top titles besides. Still, we wouldn't like to hold our breath…



MORE… FEATURES

Videogame heroes don't just grow on trees, you know – it takes time, planning and a whole lot of thought. games™ goes undercover to find out exactly what makes our favourite heroes tick.



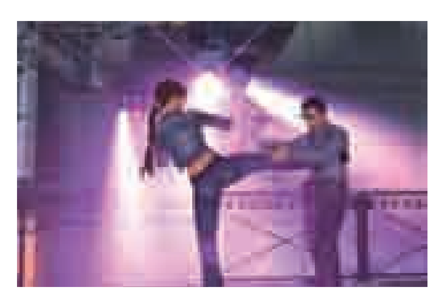
With ECTS behind us and only a few months until we can all tap our relatives for more cash, it looks like the race is on for Christmas. Fancy a ride in our one-horse open sleigh? Then you'll be needing issue 11…

ON SALE 09 OCT 03

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WHETHER IT'S TO REMIND US OF THE JOYS OF GAMING OR BEMOAN THE CURRENT STATE OF THE [INSERT CONSOLE OF CHOICE], THIS IS WHERE YOU GET TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS

Peter Courtney rattled a few cages with last month's claim that the Xbox is passionless, so the Microsoft fans are here to show him some, um, tough love.



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However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the Net browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the forum icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

Step Three:
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**mortgage**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

I'D LIKE TO say that I comprehensively disagree with Peter Courtney's analysis of the Xbox (Contact, issue 8) stating that it lacks a certain element of passion. Well, he couldn't be more wrong – my Xbox reeks of so much passion that the stench of it fills my room and hovers around me in the shops. The passion stems from the fiery glow when you turn the machine on, to the shiny plastic wrapper that dresses the games. It's passion that made the Xbox and it's passion that will bring it to the top spot.

I think Peter is afraid – afraid of change. He can't accept that the Xbox has taken the games industry a step further – you could even call it a revolution. Microsoft can't do anything about the fact that it's got heavy financial backing, but at the end of the day it's not Bill Gates and co. that make games like *Halo*, it's people with dreams and imaginations; people who are not bound by politics and facts and figures. These are people who once dreamt of making the best videogames ever, and it just so happens that the Xbox is the best machine to let them do so.
Mark Gardner

games™: Well, that sorts that one out, eh? Though we're now left with the image of you wandering round smelling of 'passion'. Nice.

I LOVE GAMES – I've spent hours enjoying classics such as *Zelda*, *Banjo Kazooie*, *Mario 64*/*Sunshine* and *GoldenEye*. And when buying my Cube I knew I'd get more of the same. The swarm of casual gamers out there happily bought their shoddy PS2s and powerhouse Xboxes – I feel sorry for these people who will never enjoy the delights of the secrets in *Sunshine*, the hidden depth in *Animal Crossing*, and the atmosphere in *Prime*. They will happily play *Enter The Matrix* and laugh when the guards fly across the floor after one kick, thinking that they're enjoying a good game. (Interestingly, *ETM* received far higher scores in Xbox/PS2 mags than GC mags.) And developers wonder why 'Cube versions of multiformat games sell so poorly. It's not because of the low user base, it's because we know what good games are so we can see this pile of turd with a shiny gloss a mile off.

The few casual gamers that bought a Cube complain that *Sunshine* is too hard or the controls in *Prime* are too complicated. If they bothered to play *Sunshine* they'd realise how good it really is – the satisfaction of completing even the most simple secrets is enormous. But casual gamers just want quick thrills, blood, violence and gore.

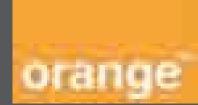
That's the real reason that third-party games are becoming a rarity on the 'Cube – not because there isn't anyone to buy them, it's just that developers aren't willing to upgrade the quality from PS2 violence overkill to something special. It's not that I don't like gore or violence, because I love *Hitman 2* and adore *Halo* – it's just needless violence for the casual gamers that brings games down. The handle on the back of the 'Cube isn't much use but it's symbolic. It's telling people to pick up the 'Cube because it's a proper games console.

Who knows, when the world of photo-realism and violence envelops itself, maybe gamers will come crawling back to Nintendo, begging for some originality. And, if Nintendo is still in business when this happens, it will

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According to some, the Xbox positively reeks of passion. And that would smell like what exactly?

welcome gamers back with open arms, because Nintendo is that nice.
Chris Ashley

games™: There are some generalisations there, but we reckon your views echo many Nintendo fans' thoughts on the state of the Cube. We suggest that you all relax and enjoy the treats that Nintendo provides for its believers.

"SPOILING THE SHIP for a ha'porth of tar" is not a proverb often used these days. Yet as I sit watching the closing credits for *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*, it seems all too appropriate. Of course, every reviewer in the land has duly documented the rudimentary problems besetting *Angel Of Darkness*, from the Saint Vitus' dance afflicting the controls, leaving Lara unpredictably 'palsying' her way to oblivion, to puzzles so badly signposted that even the hardest of hard-core gamers are left reaching for the aspirin or, even worse, a walkthrough.

I could go on. But what I find even more galling is that, beneath the litany of bugs, there lies a game tantalizingly close to brilliance. Very occasionally you see the fruits of Core's back-to-basics approach, some levels containing the kind of skilfully realised moments (a jaw-dropping vista here, a thoughtfully executed puzzle there) that made the original game so compelling all those years ago.

Angel Of Darkness also proves compelling, but only as a trial of teeth-grinding patience. A further month or so of testing would have allowed Core to fully balance the gameplay and fix such glaring errors, something that Eidos obviously valued less than launching the game in time to coincide with the latest *Tomb Raider* film. More fool them, I think – for without that last ha'porth of tar, the *Tomb Raider* franchise might well be sunk.
Chris Ward

Blood, violence, gore and 'rudey-bits'. The winning formula for great games?

"WHEN THE WORLD OF PHOTO-REALISM AND VIOLENCE ENVELOPS ITSELF, MAYBE GAMERS WILL COME BACK TO NINTENDO"

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TEXT LIFE...

PETER COURTNEY – I FEEL SORRY 4 YOU! PANZER DRAGOON, HALO, MOTO GP 2, NO PASSION IN XBOX GAMES, EH! WITH YOUR NAIVE ATTITUDE, YOU'RE BEING A FOOL TO YOURSELF!
gamesTM: Okay, okay, so the guy doesn't like the Xbox. Horses for courses and all that.

☐ I have just discovered a really great NES game: "The Lone Ranger." I urge all retro fans to get into this superb game, or at least tell me if i am delusional!
gamesTM: Can anyone help with this one?

☐ I really love your mag, but could you please show us a box shot of the game that you review, so that we'll know how it looks like when we go and buy the game?
gamesTM: Why? If you have any problems you could always just ask the friendly shop assistants to point them out for you.

☐ Could you please show release dates for budget range games as well, and why isn't there a section for the PSone?
gamesTM: In the future we'll try to include budget release dates in our schedules. As for the PSone, surely it belongs in the pages of our Retro section?

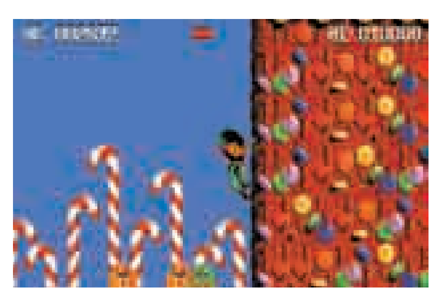
☐ Any chance of your GAME voucher coming separate from the mag, so I don't ruin the pages?
gamesTM: We'd love to but it would simply cost too much. You could always buy two magazines though…

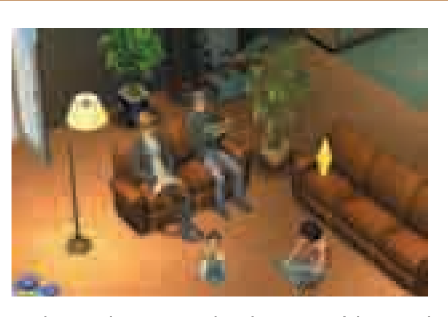
☐ Do you reckon Datel will release a PlayStation game player for the PC (hint hint)?
gamesTM: Not a chance.

☐ Is it just me or is going back to playing a game like halo incredibly difficult to adjust to after playing with the inverted x axis camera of Zelda on the cube?
gamesTM: Difficult? No. Painful? Yes.

☐ According 2 pages 37 of issue 8, KAR is not coming out on GC, but on the xbx and ps2! Looks like someone needs to be shot.
gamesTM: Yes, yes, all right, *Kirby's Air Ride* definitely *isn't* on PS2 or Xbox. But your eagle-eyes have won you a prize. Turn to page 186 to find out what it is.

☐ Any chance of the classic NBA Jam TE cuming out on the GBA?
gamesTM: There are no plans at present. And you, er, might want to check your spelling of 'coming' for future reference…





gamesTM: Much delayed and responsible for Core losing the licence to develop subsequent *Tomb Raider* titles, it's doubtful that we'll ever know what happened with *Angel Of Darkness*. The one thing that we can reasonably be certain of is that the next *Tomb Raider* game will be better. It has to be.

☐ **I AM WRITING** to congratulate you on your feature regarding the demise of 2D gaming in issue 8 of **gamesTM**. As a seasoned games player who has experienced pretty much every generation of gaming, I am saddened to see that the games industry seems to have no respect for its past. Only in the games industry are we so blinded by technological advances that we forget what we created the technology for in the first place – playing games and having fun. In its ceaseless pursuit of 3D perfection, photo-realistic imagery and the creation of worlds where "wood looks and acts just like real wood" it seems to have abandoned a whole gaming genre.

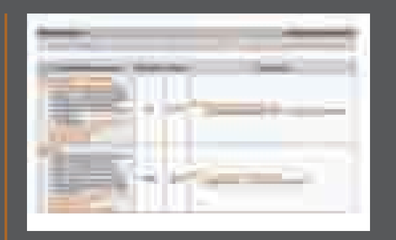
Two-dimensional gaming should have evolved just like 3D gaming. With today's hardware, 2D games could have (and should have) been amazing. Emphasis could have been placed upon fantastic animation of sprites and backdrops, shoot-'em-ups with almost unlimited enemies on screen at once with huge end-of-level bosses and mind-blowing weapons. Platformers would still be games of skill and timing instead of the almost laughable entity they have become. I'm sick of playing games where I have to learn how to rotate the camera (because no-one has yet devised a way of it sorting it out), or go through a training level because there are so many damn buttons and controls to remember. I want to pick up and play. Press X to fire and Y to jump, and if you die it's because you're crap.

Skill is timing that pixel-perfect jump or remembering the shoot-'em-up attack pattern. Just have a quick blast of *Ikaruga* and you'll see where I'm coming from. Three-dimensional gaming has its place, of course, but in the absence of 2D there is a huge void left in the market. Our 2D gaming heritage is something to be proud of and deserves to be properly represented alongside its 3D counterparts. Until this balance is redressed I'm afraid that for me there will always be something lacking in modern gaming.

One day we're going to switch on our PlayStation3 or Xbox 2, and we will see totally perfect photo-realistic 3D imagery, we'll be enveloped in wonderfully accurate 5.1 surround sound and the world on screen will seem just as real as the one we live in. And on that day, a lot of people are going to switch their console back off and just go outside…
Steve Erickson

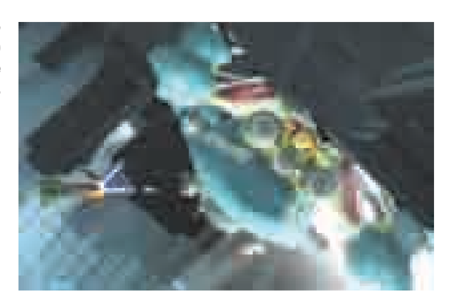
gamesTM: The demise of 2D gaming is a sad loss to the games industry. But, of course, it's about delivering gaming experiences that the masses want, and though *Ikaruga* offers a lovely slice of retro gameplay, most prefer a raft of sequels and more modern-styled games. At least you're old enough to remember 2D gaming in its heyday, and whilst we wait for a true revival there's always the GBA or the emulation scene to keep us warm.

☐ **BEN THOMAS WROTE** an interesting and intelligent letter on the subject of games being



FROM THE FORUM

Fizzy drinks, bananas, car parts – should games be sponsored?



Games like *R-Type Final* keep the 2D fires burning. Ah, the fond memories.

"OUR 2D GAMING HERITAGE IS SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF AND DESERVES TO BE PROPERLY REPRESENTED WITH ITS 3D COUNTERPARTS"

'dumbed down' (Contact, issue 8) and said that developers ought to be making games that could change society. I agree that, on the whole, videogames don't require much thought (*Resident Evil*, anyone?), and there have been books and films that have changed the way people think. However, go to your local cinema and what do you see? *Matrix Reloaded*, *Terminator 3*, *Bruce Almighty*, *The Hulk* and so on. So what can we learn from this?

All of these have strong messages wrapped up in action/comedy films, but would your average Joe come out of *Terminator 3* and think: "Man, we have to keep our technology under control before things get out of hand!" or come out of *The Matrix* and question his place in the universe? No, don't be silly.

At the end of the day, people read books, watch films and play videogames to be entertained and they couldn't give a fig about some message, but, most importantly, games publishers go to where the money is and are more likely to release another movie/sport/character tie-in than plunder the depths of intellect and attempt to release a game which the majority won't buy. Let's remember the days of bedroom coders are all but dead, and the few that are still around aren't going to develop games that will be available to a mainstream audience. The result? More *Sims* expansion packs and less *Deus Ex*.

Don't get me wrong, I agree that games could do more, but my argument is based upon the real world. In reality these things are either not going to happen or they already have happened and you haven't realised it. For example, *GoldenEye* made me realise that FPSs with no thinking required bored me to tears and that I'd rather play a game that forced you to think about what you were doing and the consequences of your actions.

Videogames *have* changed the way I view things. The difference is that the majority of society sees videogames as a cheap, dirty and illicit activity along with video nasties (i.e. a hobby for children and bums). Me? I'm happy to play my games and gain whatever I wish from them.

Andy Henderson

games™: Sure, mainstream games, films and even music tend to cater to more, shall we say, 'simple' tastes in just the same way Saturday evening TV programmes do, but the laudable point that Ben was trying to make was that occasionally games could (and perhaps should) try to make us think about the world differently. Of course, very few actually do, which is a shame because the inaccurate labels attached to videogames and the people that enjoy them are based upon other people's understanding that games are violent, trashy and a waste of time. Though looking at some titles, you can kind of understand why – *GTA:Vice City* will never win over the *Daily Mail*. But then do we really want it to?

first_samurai
09/08/03 06:44 PM
In these days of product-sponsored TV shows, I find it hard to believe that many corporations are ignoring videogames. Being a fan of what I consider to be the 'golden age' of gaming (Mega Drive and SNES) I remember such classics as *Global Gladiators* (McDonald's) and *Cool Spot* (the main character being the red dot from the 7-Up logo). When you played these games you *wanted* a Big Mac and to wash it down with a can of refreshing 7-Up. If games are as big and popular as everyone says they are how come we don't see titles like this any more? Or does anyone know of any games based entirely on a product (I don't mean passing references to something)?

Theory Of Games
09/08/03 07:52 PM
I don't think I'd want to play a game based on something like a drink or some other product. *Cool Spot* was a great game, but never made me want to drink 7-Up. I don't want product sponsorship coming into games, it would ruin the whole feeling. You play games to escape from the real world, so playing a game based on a product we see most days would suck.

RetroBob
09/08/03 07:59 PM
I'd rather not have product sponsorship – it's bad enough seeing three different companies' logos before getting to the main game screen. Imagine if it led to full-length ads before you could play a game, or in between levels. *shudders*

DarkPenfold
09/08/03 09:37 PM
Ahhh, the days of sponsorship in 16-bit games – Penguin biscuits in *RoboCod*, McDonald's in *McDonald's Land*, 7-Up in *Cool Spot*, Chupa Chups in *Zool*… the list goes on. To be honest, there's still a lot of sponsorship, although it's become far more subtle, particularly in sports games, where it masquerades as authentic pitch/track-side scenery, although the inclusion of McDonald's in *The Sims Online* was viewed as particularly odd as it brings a very visible element of the real world into a game which is supposed to detach you from it.

I think that the days of basing entire games around advertising have passed, as their type of sledgehammer delivery was a little too 'in your face'. The future is probably in subtle 'name-dropping' – take *Crazy Taxi*'s casual use of KFC and Pizza Hut restaurants, Tower Records and Surfer's Paradise stores; they seem a little odd at first, but after a while you don't really notice them as anything other than a destination (which is probably exactly what the companies want).

mmichael19691
10/08/03 01:05 AM
I'm not for games based on sponsorship, but if, like *Crazy Taxi* or *FIFA*, sports games and other games have or show adverts in them which are based on real life, then I do not mind as long as the game is good or it's not taking anything away from the gameplay.

Brian Bloodaxe
10/08/03 10:39 AM
I remember the Red Bull advertising all over *Wipeout 2097*. It kinda worked, it just seemed appropriate.

Hong Kong Phooey
10/08/03 06:43 PM
I don't really mind the advertising in games, as long as it doesn't encroach on the gameplay. Of course, if the game sucks, then it's going to suck no matter who is sponsoring it.


CONTINUE
01


games™
09/10/03